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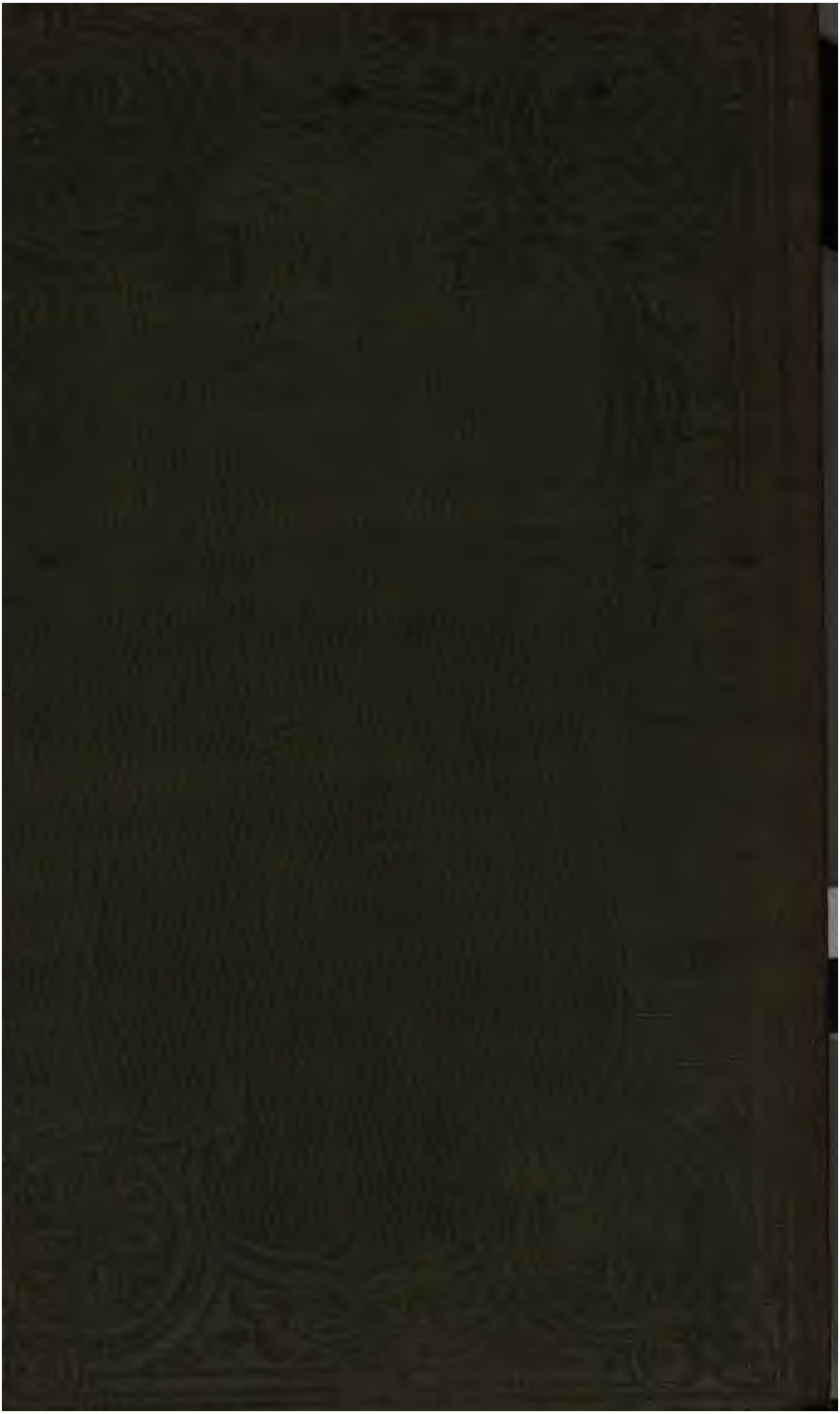

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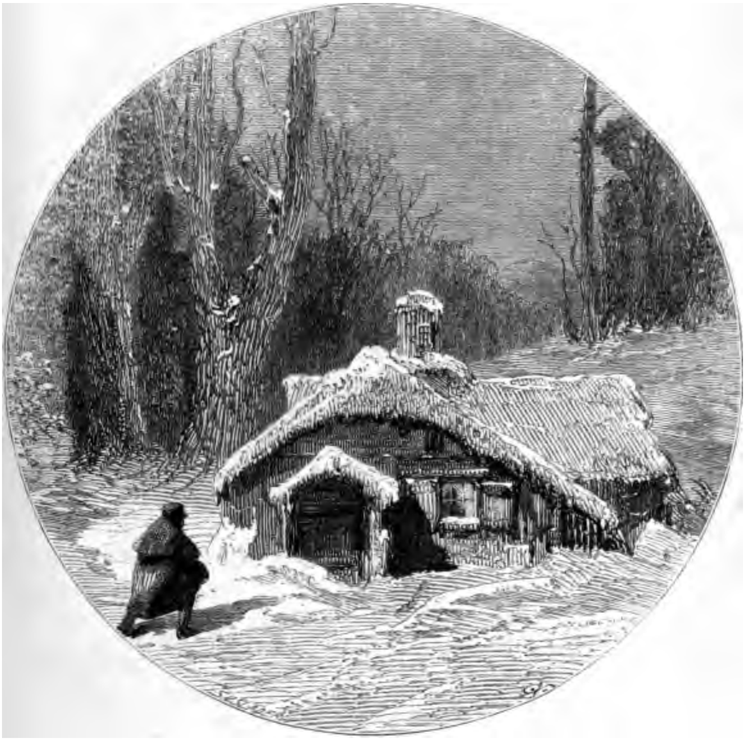

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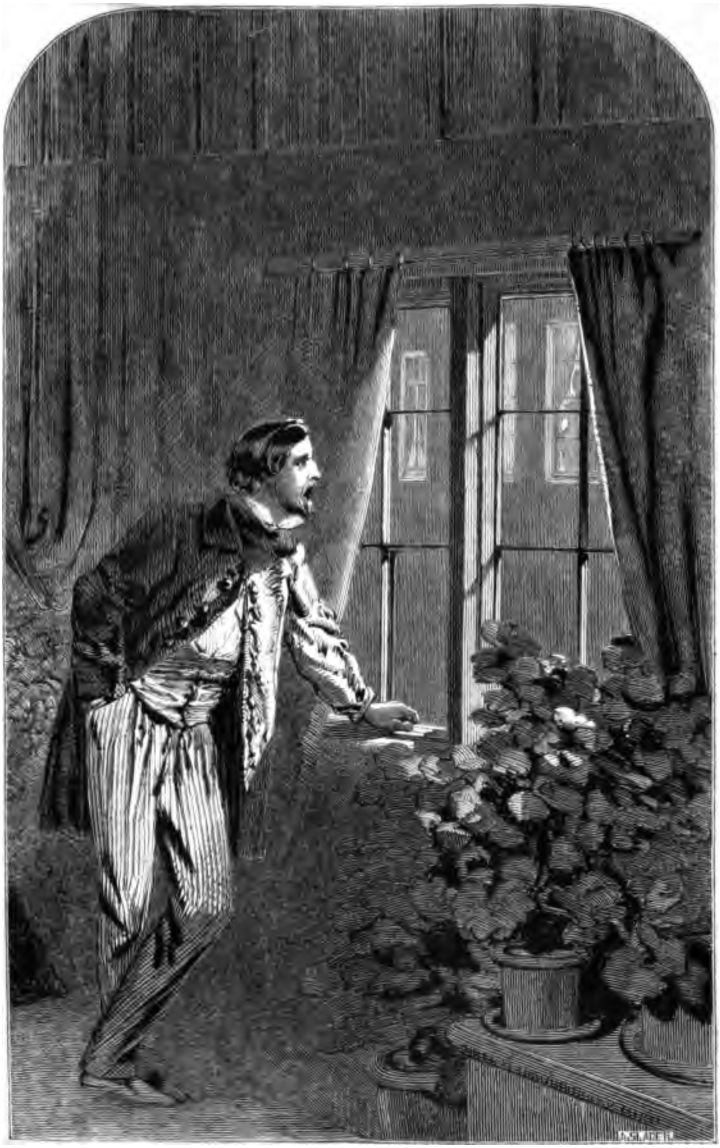

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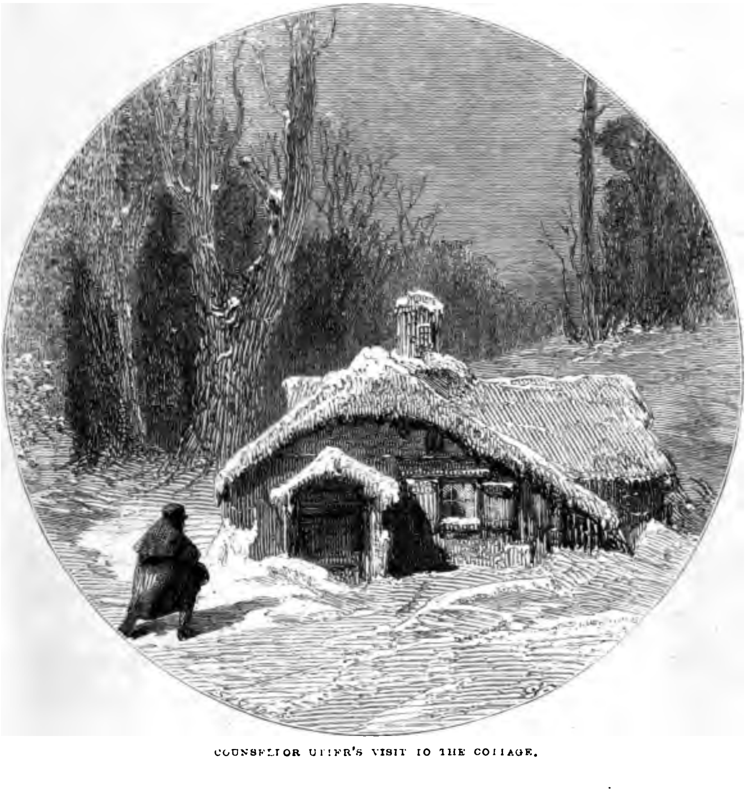

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MARIE LOUISE:

OR,

THE OPPOSITE NEIGHBOURS.

Part the First.

CHAPTER I.

On, on, my good brown steed,
And ply thy hoofs with speed!
WADMAN.

"CARL!"

"Mr. Engineer!" *

"Did you say the chaise was ready?"

"Yes, sir, I did say so—and have said so no less than four times already," replied Carl, as he blew his frozen fingers.

"Well, then, be so good as to say so for the fifth time, when you have buckled the portmanteau and set the carpet-bag to-rights."

After saying these words, Carl's master, the young surveyor, William Williamson, turning to his two young assistants, with whom he was taking a parting meal, and with a slight assumption

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* In the following tale, the hero, who is a land surveyor, evidently holds the title of "Engineer," either from past military service, or from being connected with the Swedish government as civil engineer. In Sweden, as in Germany, all titles, and the names of professions, are used in addressing a person, preceded by Mr.—as Mr. Doctor, Mr. Postmaster, Mr. Engineer, &c.

B

of dignity in his tone, said, "Yes, my friends, we take leave of each other for this year, but by next spring you will again find full employment with me, for, thanks to God, I have received commissions for several important works; and in drinking this parting glass together, my friends, we will hope that we may pass next summer as pleasantly as the last. If we have shared in a little hard work now and then, we have also had our pleasant hours occasionally." And after this toast followed several others, and amongst them the good wishes of the young men for the happy settlement of the engineer in the little town to which he was going: until at last, Carl, with a discontented face, appeared for the sixth and last time upon the threshold.

"Yes, yes, I see; it is time that I started. Here, then, give me my cloak and fur!"

After our engineer had shaken hands with the two young men, and had patted his hostess on both shoulders, he jumped into the chaise which stood at the door, at the same time that Carl seated himself beside him.

"What is the matter, my good fellow? Have you lost your tongue?" said the engineer, as he took the reins from the hands of his attendant.

"No wonder I should lose my tongue. Mr. Engineer has been sitting within there in warmth and comfort, whilst I was out here all the while, half frozen to death," replied Carl, with a familiarity that he was accustomed to assume.

"Very wisely said, brother Carl. It is quite right that, when I forget you, you should not forget yourself. Come, I will sit here and freeze in your place, whilst you run in and get a glass of beer and stick a bit of bread and cheese in your pocket. You may also bring a little oat cake for the bay. You see, he is too high-minded to complain. But make haste, or you know I can find means to warm you in case of need."

A few minutes later, and the green chaise of the young engineer rattled over the court-yard, the ground of which was hard with the autumn frost.

CHAPTER II.

I came, I sought, I found.
LÄSTADIUS.

The sun shines brightly in,
And warmth prevails around;
No pomp or pride is seen,
But comfort there is found.
WADSTRÖM.

THE four tallow candles in the town club-room were already lighted. Some of the members had seated themselves at the card-table; others read the advertisements, and others consoled themselves with a pipe and glass of toddy, until their turn came for these amusements. In the little parlour behind sat Mistress Elmgren, the patroness of the club, spreading bread and butter, which the gentlemen, in default of a waiter, fetched themselves or eat by the side of their hostess, who, at times, invited her most intimate acquaintances to take a glass of what she called a "cold exterminator," or ale posset.

The only "rose of the cellar," the red-cheeked Lotta, was in the act of crossing the threshold of the little parlour with a bowl of ale posset in her hands, when an important event occurred—namely, the stoppage of a carriage before the door of the inn. It had been so long since any stranger had come into the town, that it was quite excusable in both guests and hostess peeping behind the window-curtains, in order to see, with the help of the moon, who could be without so late.

"Goodness me, Mistress Elmgren! and the guest-chamber stove has never been lighted!" exclaimed Lotta, quite in dismay.

"You goose!" replied her mistress. "Do you think I would waste my wood so foolishly as to heat the guest-chamber stove, when not more than two or three travellers come in a month? No, indeed! if people do not choose to come oftener, they must put up with what we can manage for them when they do come. But go and light the gentleman in—he can come and stay a little while in the parlour here."

The traveller was no other than our young surveyor, who, though little acquainted with the town in which he was taking refuge, yet preferred spending his winter there, rather than in the country. "When one is sociably disposed oneself," thought he, "one soon finds society enough;" and as Williamson was an agreeable young man, it was probable that his expectations would be fulfilled.

"I find," said the town-counseller Utter, after conversing some time with the stranger, and then approaching Mistress Elmgren's round table in the back parlour, "I find that my good cousin has no warm room up stairs, so perhaps the young gentleman had better come over to us, as it so happens that my brother-in-law has lately been with us, and our upper rooms are well aired."

"Take him away with you, cousin Utter," said the landlady, smiling; "I am not one of those who cannot grant a little favour to another." The true cause of her readiness to oblige arising, however, from Mistress Elmgren well knowing by experience, that travellers who only remain one night in the house bring more trouble than profit.

"*A la bonne heure!*" said Williamson, as the counsellor, amid many compliments, brought forward his proposal; "and if the rooms should suit me, I shall gladly retain them for a longer period."

"Cousin Utter! cousin Utter!—Counsellor Utter!" cried Mistress Elmgren, suddenly changing her mind. "It was only a joke of mine—you can well understand, cousin Utter, that when the room is once well warmed, I should not—but, cousin Utter, do you not hear?"

Cousin Utter took care not to hear. He hastened, on the contrary, to secure his booty, and as Mistress Elmgren ran into the club-room after them to assert her rights, nothing of the counsellor and the guest was to be seen, but the stick of the former and the whip of the latter.

"Well, this is what one gets when one is good-natured to one's friends," thundered out our hostess. "They are not ashamed to carry off travellers from under one's very nose! Very soon they will be lying in wait for them before the door—such contemptible company as comes to this house!" The burden of Mistress Elmgren's song was always a lament over the company which frequented her inn, a lament which she now meant as a fine stroke at the burgomaster, who, seated at the solitary card table of the club-room, seemed however as if he saw and heard nothing.

Counsellor Utter leading the way, our engineer with all his possessions—the bay horse, Carl, the chaise, and his luggage were transported across the market-place to what was called Strand Street, in which the house of the Utters stood. As far as the moonlight would permit him to distinguish objects, it appeared to Williamson as if his future dwelling, with the little flower border three ells wide on each side of the steps, would please him well.

"Mother!" cried the counsellor, as he tapped at the door; "Mother! come with a light and open the door. We have a stranger guest here."

"And after all, our black cow has quite as good flesh on her bones now as before the attack on the hay-rack."

"Nothing more need be said about it," added the old lady, now quite vanquished, especially by the pleasing prospect of how smart she would look in muff and fur tippet, driving up to the church on Sunday,—"Nothing more need be said about it."

And now for the inspection of the apartments. The upper floor of the Utters' house consisted of, besides their own sitting-room, two roomy chambers, and a little closet that the engineer immediately assigned to Carl. The outer room was covered with a bright coloured carpet, which gave it a lively air. It was called the parlour, and was furnished in a style betokening respectability and a simple taste. Most pleasant of all, however, was the sleeping room, with its cheerful bow-window, which almost formed a separate little cabinet, or rather conservatory, as in it the counsellor kept the plants which, in winter time, were brought in out of the garden, and for which there was no room in the parlour. Near the window stood the bed, with white hangings over brass poles. A fire on the hearth welcomed the new lodger, and all was well dusted and scoured.

The engineer felt himself quite at home. From time to time he pressed the hand of his host, as he ran to and fro and examined everything, even to the corner cupboard and wardrobe.

"Yes; thank God it is as it is," said the old counsellor, much delighted. "When I and my old woman married, this little dwelling was only one story high, and had been so in the time of my father and grandfather. But Gretchen, my old wife, was so troubled not to have an upper floor, like the rest of her neighbours, that I gave in to it for the sake of peace."

"And were you not right glad afterwards, good father?" asked Mistress Utter, looking kindly at the old man.

"Ay, indeed! it was downright pretty. But, Mr. Engineer, believe me, Rome was not built in a day. One year the walls were built; the next, they were fitted up inside; in a third, we got the furniture together; and in the fourth and last, as we wanted to have everything finished by Christmas, the good mother, with her own hands, made all the covers to the furniture and cushions, and arranged the curtains and carpets herself. Then we gave a feast, and had the burgomaster and the provost and many other friends; and on this our second wedding day, as we called it, we were right merry, Mr. Engineer, for Gretchen and I had then been married five-and-twenty years."

"And we will hope that you will celebrate a not less merry 'golden wedding,'"* said the engineer, in a friendly tone. "But to return again to our business, I have a proposal to make which I must with propriety address to Mistress Utter, since I know that on these points the ladies have the casting vote. Would it not be possible that I and my servant should also board here? I know of nothing more tiresome in a little town than to have to dine at an eating-house, where it is the same as dining alone. And nothing is more disagreeable than to miss any of the comforts of home when one is engaged over work requiring close attention."

This proposal was quickly assented to, and in the course of a few hours our surveyor, with bag and baggage, was comfortably established in his new abode.

"Now, Carl, what do you think of all this?" asked Williamson, as Carl assisted him to pull off his boots.

"I think, master, that all will be beautiful," answered Carl, with an air of satisfaction. "I got such excellent porridge for supper, that our old hostess in the country would have jumped for joy to see how white it was. And, if I may venture to boast,

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* In Sweden, Germany, &c., the fiftieth anniversary of a wedding is so called.

I was as brisk as a perch after it, and cleaned the knives and snuffers till they shone like the sun in Carlstadt."

"Good! I know how you can speechify about your own talents, my fine fellow. Only take care that my boots shine as bright as Mrs. Utter's snuffers. And mind also, that if the coffee comes up too early to-morrow morning, beg them very politely to keep it warm until I am awake, and if this is not before nine o'clock, you may wake me yourself—and now be off with you!"

When the engineer, on the following morning, at about eleven o'clock, went down stairs to join his hosts, he found that the counsellor, after waiting long at the breakfast table, had departed to the council room, and the former friendly countenance of the old lady showed two decided wrinkles over the eyebrow.

"My good young gentleman," said she, in a kind but right mother-like tone of reproof, "we keep house after the old fashion, and if Mr. Engineer wishes to become a guest at our table, he must keep our hours. In winter we always take our coffee at seven o'clock, and at half-past nine is our breakfast hour. At one o'clock we dine, and sup at eight o'clock in the evening."

"But, my dear Mrs. Utter, did I not arrive after my journey last night tired and frozen, and do I not deserve a little mitigation of the punishment I see threatening me? When I am regularly at work, I usually take my morning coffee as early even as six o'clock; and if at dinner-time I should not be at home at the right hour, I must beg of you not to wait for me."

"Well, well! it was not badly meant," rejoined the old lady, appeased by his friendly tone. "A quarter of an hour we could always wait, so now come and sit down and make yourself comfortable;" and as she spoke, she opened the door of the stove, and brought out a smoking hot cutlet.

CHAPTER III.

Where'er thou turn'st thy steps,
Greetings and open arms await thee.
DAHLGREN.

At last every thing was arranged.

With Carl's assistance the portmanteau was emptied, and its contents dusted and laid in a nice wardrobe. Maps were hung all around on the walls, and the writing table, which, during the first week, changed its situation at least ten times a day, had at last its appointed place in the recess of the deep bow-window, where the light was best suited for working.

Amongst other business to transact, it was also necessary that the engineer should pay his calls at all the most respectable houses of the town, and his efforts to secure a little friendly intercourse were crowned by four invitations. In a short time he had taken tea at the burgomaster's, the doctor's, the rector's, and the postmaster's. A young, handsome, and agreeable man, of good manners and lively disposition, in a town where daughters are more numerous than sons, is soon liked, and sought after. Nothing was talked of in the whole place but the agreeable Engineer Williamson, who at the postmaster's tea-party had worn his uniform, whilst at the burgomaster's he had been dressed in black; and the old counsellor's lady, who received a gentle hint to reveal whether this remarkable circumstance arose out of a decided inclination for the postmaster's daughter, Henrietta, was obliged to declare (and as a matter of course, no one believed her) that Carl had only forgotten that evening to fetch his master's black coat from the tailor's, where it had been sent to have the lining mended.

This was thought to be only an invention to conceal the truth. Such a man—a perfect angel of a man, to have a torn lining to his coat. No—Heaven forbid! The putting on of the uniform on an occasion when it was neither a christening, a wedding, nor a funeral, was nothing more nor less than an open declaration in favour of the postmaster's family.

Now, our hero was not unaware of the importance which was attached to his person in this good little town, but he never dreamed that it went so far as that, through Carl's accidental negligence, he should be placed on the town list of suitors; especially as he was not conscious of having given any lady the preference, with the exception of two blooming married ladies, whom he considered the most distinguished ornaments of the circle. Williamson's mind had ever been too open to poetry and joy for him not to have nourished impressions received in childhood, which could not easily be mingled with feelings of a lighter kind. He had, besides, been accustomed to pursue his profession with earnestness, and as he now felt that he was beginning to spend too much time in society, he wisely resolved to make up the loss with renewed diligence, so that he might not be sensible of being in arrears.

"Take the key out of the door, Carl," said he; "and, let who come that will, I am not at home. Do you understand?"

Three days long he worked after his old manner, and without allowing himself any other distraction than now and then casting a glance across the streets to an opposite bow-window. On the first day he remarked that he had a neighbour, and perceived in a fugitive glance the outline of an old lady's head. On another day, as he stood at his window mending a pen, he fancied he perceived something noble in the countenance, which inspired him with a feeling of reverence, and irresistibly he smiled at the old lady, who was busy folding up certain things in paper. He could not decide what it was, but afterwards discovered that it was cakes of chocolate, which, after being very carefully prepared, were sent for sale into the town. On the third day—for the engineer was an admirer of fine old women's faces—he could not resist making a sort of acquaintance with her, by bowing respectfully over his table, a politeness which the inhabitant of the opposite bow-window (who was not so very old either) returned with an inclination of the head.

Good resolutions, however, cannot last for ever. Williamson began to find out, that in a little town, where one has made a number of acquaintances, it is not so easy to get on with business as when in the retirement of the country, where, in winter, work becomes almost an amusement. He could not conceal from himself an inclination to make an exception to Carl's orders with regard to visitors, and the end of it was that the engineer, on the fourth, fifth, and sixth days of his first week's work, found it would be impolite to decline the visits or invitations of this or that good friend; and at last came the discovery that so much night-work injured his eyes.

This unusual circumstance could not occur to a person overwhelmed with work without some portion of his business being neglected, which, to one who had won great confidence for punctuality, might become serious in its consequences; and as Williamson remarked that he would soon be behindhand, he began to look out for some poor fellow to whom he would be a most welcome benefactor, in giving him a part of his labour to perform, were it only copying writing or colouring maps.

"Perhaps you may happen to know some one, Counsellor Utter, who writes a good fine hand?" asked the engineer, the next time he fell in with his host. "I have undertaken so much work just now that I am in want of an assistant."

"The old organist writes pretty well if he had time; but he is rather slow. And we have a reduced tradesman here, too, who is glad of something to do when he can get it: but to tell the truth, he is rather given to drinking, so that one could not entrust anything of importance to him."

"Then, is there, in Heaven's name, no poor but respectable soul to whom such a thing would be a favour?" for Williamson wanted, if possible, to find, in the certainty of assisting a fellow-creature, an excuse for himself and his own reproaches, when he remembered the advice of his beloved and deceased mother, "never to forget how necessary is work in youth to lay the foundation of comforts in old age, and that no prosperity tastes sweeter, or bears better fruit, than that which one creates for oneself through noble industry."

"Yes, indeed, there is," answered the counsellor, smiling at his zeal. "There is just the person you mean, when I come to think of it, and not far from here either—only, were Mr. Engineer to try ever so long, he would never guess who it is in our town who writes quickest, and has the most beautiful hand."

"Well, tell me who is this treasure—some private secretary from Stockholm, perhaps, who has wandered out of his way here."

"A secretary? Yes, yes, something of the kind," laughed the counseller. "Or rather a secretary-*ess*. She has actually gone through many a thick manuscript already for the burgomaster and fiscal."

"What! a lady?"

"Yes, a lady, and, moreover, the neighbour of Mr. Engineer, in the opposite bow."

"That nice lady."

"So; so; Mr. Engineer has already, I see, made a discovery. but it is not the old lady, for she knows no use in paper but to spoil it with her old chocolate cakes. But look you, the daughter, 'the beauty of the bow-window,' as we call her, she knows what is the use of a quire of paper. She can not only write it full without smearing the edges, but she can mount paper beautifully, and draw flowers and patterns on it, which the clever little lady copies from the plants that I raise in my garden out there."

"Oh, my dear good counsellor, this is indeed quite a net-full of news," exclaimed the engineer, quite pleased. "An idea has come into my head. If this beautiful young lady is so clever in drawing patterns, I would wager that she could also copy and colour my maps."

"Yes, I will answer for it that she can do whatever she likes. There is but one difficulty, which is, that she is not at home at present. She went some weeks ago to a fine house in the country, where she gives lessons in drawing, but she will soon come home, I fancy."

"And this beautiful unknown is called ——"

"Marie Louise N——. Her father was a poor captain, who, to use an old proverb, always 'carried his head under his arm,' and left his widow in necessitous circumstances. But she herself was, in her youth, a genteel and well brought-up young lady, and only through the rogue Cupid was led into marrying the blustering fellow, against the will of her relations. So she lost the grand relations of whom she boasts at times, but there was left her a good portion of reason and knowledge; and as she is a very good mother, she has contrived to give both of these to her daughter, and it is the young girl who principally provides their little income."

"But does not the mother make chocolate?" said Williamson, in a tone which showed the sympathy he had already began to feel for this "poor family."

"Certainly, certainly; she cannot sit there with her hands in her lap, whilst the young lady, like an angel, works for two. And the chocolate, although I never drink such stuff, is right good, at least so Gretchen says, who understands these kind of things."

"And has heaven sent no lover to such a clever young maiden?"

"Yes, indeed, she might have been betrothed and married, too, by this time, were she not so hard to please, for it must be owned that she has a touch of the fine lady about her; and, in confidence, I must tell you (but let no one hear a word about it) that the doctor and the apothecary have both received 'baskets,'* before they were accepted elsewhere. The most wonderful part of the affair, however, is that one of her relations, on her father's side, a good respectable steady fellow—he drives six pair of oxen to our yearly market—even he has had a 'basket.' We call him the yearly suitor, for he always comes in his chaise behind the oxen, and after paying his addresses each time, returns home with a long face."

"That I admire," added the engineer, with emphasis. "A poor maiden who disdains to become a rich lady, has character. Labour will to her be no hardship."

"No, that one may very well say, and one sees that it is so. She blooms like one of my finest roses in the middle of summer."

After this conversation Williamson's looks wandered ten times in the quarter of an hour from his own window towards that of his opposite neighbour. But he could discover no rose. "She may nevertheless be at home without letting herself be seen at the window—but I will soon ascertain that. Carl!"

"Mr. Engineer!"

"Run over to Mistress N——, who lives over the way, and buy six of her cakes of chocolate."

Carl was already in the outer room, when, as if accidentally, he was called back again.

"Stop! I remember something else I want. Ask whether a person does not live there who would undertake writing. I have heard of some one there who can do it."

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* To get a basket, is to be refused.

After this the engineer drew his curtains down, and, hidden behind them, his eye placed at a little hole, which he had accidentally torn after the interesting discovery, and which hole was hidden in a deep fold on any chance visit of Mistress Utter, he stood in ambush, to watch the result of Carl's mission.

The lady of the opposite "bow" did not this day sit at the window, which early that morning had been furnished with clean white curtains. Although Williamson, in defiance of the reproaches to be expected from his hostess, widened considerably the hole in the curtain, it was all in vain. Nothing had been seen to move at the window, when Carl sprang back over the street.

"Well?" asked the engineer, and raised his eyes from his papers, whilst he pretended to be very busy with them.

"I am to fetch the chocolate to-morrow. She says she has none ready."

"And the copying?—that you have evidently forgotten."

"No; I thought of it, and am to have an answer about it also to-morrow."

"That is right! To-day I will be undisturbed, and work. Lock the door, and remember I am at home to no one to-day."

Williamson added one fact to the other. The clean window-curtains, and the circumstance that he was to have an answer to-morrow, plainly showed that Marie Louise N—— would return to-day.

Our hero said to himself, that it was in the highest degree absurd to let these trifles interest him, and withdraw his attention from other thoughts; but on the other hand, it was pardonable that a young man should rejoice at the prospect of seeing a pretty neighbour of whom he had heard so much good. When he had once seen her the fever would be soon allayed.

The day and the evening, however, passed over without any

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"No; I thought of it, and am to have an answer about it also to-morrow."

"That is right! To-day I will be undisturbed, and work. Lock the door, and remember I am at home to no one to-day."

Williamson added one fact to the other. The clean window-curtains, and the circumstance that he was to have an answer to-morrow, plainly showed that Marie Louise N—— would return to-day.

Our hero said to himself, that it was in the highest degree absurd to let these trifles interest him, and withdraw his attention from other thoughts; but on the other hand, it was pardonable that a young man should rejoice at the prospect of seeing a pretty neighbour of whom he had heard so much good. When he had once seen her the fever would be soon allayed.

The day and the evening, however, passed over without any

"And has heaven sent no lover to such a clever young maiden?"

"Yes, indeed, she might have been betrothed and married, too, by this time, were she not so hard to please, for it must be owned that she has a touch of the fine lady about her; and, in confidence, I must tell you (but let no one hear a word about it) that the doctor and the apothecary have both received 'baskets,'* before they were accepted elsewhere. The most wonderful part of the affair, however, is that one of her relations, on her father's side, a good respectable steady fellow—he drives six pair of oxen to our yearly market—even he has had a 'basket.' We call him the yearly suitor, for he always comes in his chaise behind the oxen, and after paying his addresses each time, returns home with a long face."

"That I admire," added the engineer, with emphasis. "A poor maiden who disdains to become a rich lady, has character. Labour will to her be no hardship."

"No, that one may very well say, and one sees that it is so. She blooms like one of my finest roses in the middle of summer."

After this conversation Williamson's looks wandered ten times in the quarter of an hour from his own window towards that of his opposite neighbour. But he could discover no rose. "She may nevertheless be at home without letting herself be seen at the window—but I will soon ascertain that. Carl!"

"Mr. Engineer!"

"Run over to Mistress N——, who lives over the way, and buy six of her cakes of chocolate."

Carl was already in the outer room, when, as if accidentally, he was called back again.

"Stop! I remember something else I want. Ask whether a person does not live there who would undertake writing. I have heard of some one there who can do it."

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* To get a basket, is to be refused.

After this the engineer drew his curtains down, and, hidden behind them, his eye placed at a little hole, which he had accidentally torn after the interesting discovery, and which hole was hidden in a deep fold on any chance visit of Mistress Utter, he stood in ambush, to watch the result of Carl's mission.

The lady of the opposite "bow" did not this day sit at the window, which early that morning had been furnished with clean white curtains. Although Williamson, in defiance of the reproaches to be expected from his hostess, widened considerably the hole in the curtain, it was all in vain. Nothing had been seen to move at the window, when Carl sprang back over the street.

"Well?" asked the engineer, and raised his eyes from his papers, whilst he pretended to be very busy with them.

"I am to fetch the chocolate to-morrow. She says she has none ready."

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dow he saw her as she returned the same forenoon. "Beautiful as Heaven knows what—but—"

This "but" he could not well explain to himself, and it presented itself again on the following evening, when he had the pleasure of meeting the young lady at a little party at one of his town acquaintances. Until now, Williamson had never found himself deficient in either words or confidence in approaching either a married woman or young single lady. But when Marie Louise, among the latest of the guests—as if she were quite another person from the poor girl of the bow-windowed room working for her bread,—as she entered, greeting right and left, and at a sign from the hostess took her seat at her side, her bright-coloured and stiff chintz dress spread out as if it were of silk,—there was something in the whole of her appearance, her upright figure, and well-turned head—in these greetings, and in the very spreading out of her dress, on whose outermost fold rested a small glove and laced handkerchief,—there was something in all this that held Williamson back from approaching her at first. For the first time, it seemed as if it would be very bold to make acquaintance with her without further introduction. He almost blushed as he thought that he had wished this beautiful, and, certainly, proud young girl, to sit down and copy out fair his stupid scribblings.

Whilst Williamson was conversing with one of the gentlemen, he placed himself so that he could listen to Marie Louise's voice, who was giving the ladies a description of her journey, and the pleasure it gave her, and especially her joy at returning back to her little home and her good mother.

"You have got a new neighbour, Marie Louise," whispered one of the ladies.

"Yes, so I hear. The Utters have taken a lodger."

"A very agreeable, extremely well educated young man."

"Indeed !" said Marie Louise.

In this simple word there lay no expression of either doubt or contradiction of the assertion made; but so entirely was it without signification, that there was something disagreeable in it, and Williamson, who, with one ear, had been listening to the conversation at the ladies' table, actually burned with vexation. He could not exactly assert that he was a perfectly well educated man, but he thought himself something of the kind, and could not imagine what cause he could have given for the "indeed" of the young lady—unless—Ah ! how stupid—now he had got it; it must be the message through Carl about the copying. He ought to have managed it in quite a different way. Still, how could he have imagined that his neighbour, instead of being the pretty coquette he had thought her, should make her appearance as a young lady of the most "presentable" kind ?

Without well knowing how it happened, Williamson found himself seated in a part of the room where the ladies were at work, and where the hostess now presented the Engineer Williamson to Marie Louise N——, with the *naïve* remark, "One may feel sure that the engineer must have already seen his beautiful opposite neighbour."

"To my knowledge, I have not yet had the honour," answered Williamson, who had not sufficiently recovered himself to tell the truth.

"Nay, only listen to that—what a rogue!—he wants to make game of us experienced old people. When I look Engineer Williamson in the face,—and just now, too, as I look at his blushes, and say that he has already seen the young lady, what will his conscience reply ?"

"That I cannot exactly say, but it could be proved no doubt that a lady is never in the wrong, except when it pleases her to place a gentleman in the critical situation of having either to tell an untruth, or to contradict where he ought to agree."

"Ah—there we have him fast," said the hostess, laughing, "and believe him who will. However, let us proclaim peace on this subject in the name of politeness. Tell us now, Mr. Engineer, whether you are a good hand at boston, as, in that case, I shall enlist your services?"

"Alas! my good lady, I am unfortunately a good hand at nothing, and least of all in card-playing, in which I can scarcely even call myself a learner."

"Nonsense—we will do our best to put the burgomaster's wife out of countenance."

"But I assure you that——"

"I assure you that these are only excuses, in order that you may stay to amuse yourself with the young ladies. But really, Mr. Engineer, you must play the first game with me."

"At your commands;" and Williamson, who had not been able to speak a word to the young lady to whom he had been introduced, was obliged to allow himself to be carried off by the old lady, who laughed heartily over her triumph. After two mortally long hours, the moment of liberation came at last. The lady allowed herself to be satisfied that his place should be taken by her former admirer, an old assessor.

Williamson left his seat with delight, and let nothing prevent him from sitting down by the side of Marie Louise. Yet a tie was on his tongue, so that he began by looking at her work as it lay on the table.

Marie Louise was embroidering a pair of cuffs, which were universally admired.

"I cannot think how you can do such fine work by candle-light," said one of her intimate acquaintances; "I mean that your eyes must have suffered from drawing and writing so much."

"Oh, I cannot say that; embroidery tries the sight still more in the long run."

Have you much to write at present?"

"Just at this moment, nothing."

Williamson's blood ran quicker. Should he consider that this was said in order to let him know that his wishes could be complied with, no other answer having yet been sent to his message? Perhaps! yet certainly it would be quite improper for them to say anything now on the matter. Some subject must however be broached. Yet only with the greatest difficulty could he conquer the shyness which this evening overcame him.

"You are lately returned from a long journey, I believe?"

"Oh, not a very long one. It was only a little visit to some acquaintances; and in the meantime our little society has gained an additional member."

Williamson bowed, but the glance which he expected to have met from the young lady's eyes, passed by him. He fancied that he perceived a flash from the most beautiful of shooting stars; but it must have been a mistake, for Marie Louise looked with indifference down at her work again.

Her cotton ball rolled to the ground without any assistance from coquetry, and as Williamson attempted to pick it up, he was very near knocking his head against that of an equally officious young clerk. At last he succeeded in handing her the ball.

"It is a naughty little thing," said Marie Louise, as she thanked him, "and" (drawing out her work-bag) "we had better put it in here." Williamson blushed again. Why had he not laid the ball on the table, instead of giving it to herself? "She is a coquette," was his first remark. "And I am playing the part of a very calf," was his second.

After supper, the Counsellor Utter and the host took out their violins. They had played together many duets in their youth, but were willing now to play dance music for the young people.

"She will at least accept my hand as a partner," thought Williamson, and went straight up to Marie Louise and begged for the honour of a waltz with her.

Marie Louise stood up and laid the tips of her fingers on his, but so lightly, that he seemed only to touch her glove.

A waltz can be made a very confidential dance. During many a one had Williamson in his gallantry whispered all kinds of pretty things in his partner's ear; but in this case, the old tone would not answer. To be sure his arm lay round the young girl's waist—to be sure he looked on her lovely face, rosy with warmth and youthful activity, and more than once it happened that her curls were wafted near enough to touch his own—and yet—in her looks lay much soul, but no spark of excitement. The waltz began and ended, without anything more than a couple of syllables being exchanged between them. A part of the company escorted Marie Louise to her own door, and Williamson gained an opportunity for taking leave of her. "We are neighbours," said he, for he feared not to get out something—"may I venture to take the liberty——?"

"The ill health of my mother," replied the young girl, drawing back, "and, I must own, her circumstances also, make it almost a duty to deny herself the pleasure of hospitality. In case, however, that you have business"—she blushed, and her eyes, half raised to his, were quickly cast down—"we are at home every morning—at least mamma." She bowed politely, and vanished.

"So, so!" murmured Williamson, whilst he mounted the steps to his own apartments; "I call that cutting the matter short very unceremoniously. Yes, she *is* beautiful, but—but—"

Carl was fast asleep on a chair in the outer room, and although he roused himself directly, half drunk with sleep, it happened—which had not come to pass for a long time (as he was allowed to pass his time as he liked whilst sitting up for his master)—that he felt, to his great astonishment, his back tingle with the powerful hand of the engineer.

"You negligent rascal! am I to break my shins in the dark here?"

Carl lighted a candle without saying a word. He was too well trained not to see how matters stood. The engineer went into his sleeping room.

"What is all this about? How come my curtains to be down when it's bright moonlight?"

"You threatened to box my ears the last time that I forgot to draw them down."

"There was no moon that night, stupid head!"

"Yes, indeed; but to-night it is not so very bright——"

"No arguing! Draw the curtains up; but to-morrow morning early you must draw them down again. Do you hear?"

"Very well, sir; only be so good in future to let me know when you wish it otherwise."

"Be off with you!"

Williamson laid himself down in the so-called moonlight, which resembled very closely the celebrated Stockholm "police moonshine;" but it was impossible to sleep, since, for at least two hours longer, a light was burning opposite, and the outlines of a form that he well recognised was to be seen through the curtain. She was busy at the table in the bow-window; but what she was doing he could not see.

"She is so poor, that she is obliged to work far into the night—and yet proud, as if she were the heiress of millions."

CHAPTER V.

By Heaven man was never meant to be a slave,
When freedom of the will to him it gave;
And the heart's pastures, ne'er in gloomy night,
Grow desolate, when cheered by duty's light.
Euphrosyne.

"MARIE LOUISE, my dear child, do not sit up any longer; it is past one o'clock. It is some time since I heard the watchman's call."

"Ah! if you could only go to sleep, mamma!" Marie Louise turned to the side where her mother's bed, with its large-flowered curtains, stood in a recess. She and her mother, like their neighbour, had two rooms, but in winter they could only use one.

"I cannot sleep whilst you are sitting up."

"Then I must go to bed, dear mamma, although you know that I have promised Baroness Segerstad to get the cap and cuffs finished by next week; and besides, to-night I am not in the least sleepy."

"Well, then, let us chat a little, which is just as good as pretending to be asleep when I am awake. Was it pleasant this evening at the Lundens', my love?"

"Oh, pretty well—nothing particular."

"You saw the Utters' new lodger, did you not; I guess that he must have been there?"

"Yes, of course."

"Is he a respectable young man? He seems at a distance, as far as I can judge, both good-looking and nice."

"Yes; and I think he loses nothing when one sees him nearer."

"Did he speak to you?"

"Yes, and danced with me. But he did not carry on any very interesting conversation, so that I fear he is in this respect much the same as any other gentleman."

If our poor engineer could have heard this judgment! It was just as well he did not, as in that case he certainly would have turned his back upon the little town, and there would have been an end to our history. Luckily, however, at the very moment that Marie Louise was saying this last sentence to her mother, Williamson was saying to himself,—"She certainly will have remarked immediately that I am quite of a different stamp to the other blockheads who are paying court to her."

God be thanked that we have all of us this self-love! Now and then it may do much harm, but at other times it does much good.

"You mean that he is rather awkward—perhaps, as if he was unaccustomed to the language of good society?" asked her mother.

"No, I did not mean awkward! But he seemed to be what a man often becomes when he has not much intercourse with well-educated women, that is, shy, and at the same time rather forward."

Better and better.

"At all events," continued Williamson, as he stretched himself over the edge of the bed, and looked towards the silhouette in the opposite bow, as he continued his conversation with himself, "at all events, she must have seen that I have lived in good society."

"Did he mention anything about the copying?" asked the mother.

"No, so shy was he. I gave him, however, a passing hint about it, and he may understand from what I said, that he can speak to me on the subject when he wishes."

"You were quite right! Copying, which is paid for by the line, is very profitable. Perhaps he is coming over himself about it, as he has not sent the young lad again."

"He mentioned something of the kind as we parted at the door—but you know, mamma, how shabby everything looks here."

"We might have things better if you liked, my dear Marie Louise, *that* every body in the town knows, and perhaps he too. But even as it is, we ought not to be unpolite to people—perhaps you offended him? I know that you are not particular enough now and then."

"No, dear mamma, he could not feel offended. I do not exactly remember what I said, but I know at any rate that I told him we were always at home in the forenoon."

There was a pause in their talk for some time. Marie Louise's busy fingers moved as quickly with the embroidery needle, as if it had been the plain sewing of a piece of linen which was in her hands.

"You have never told me," began her mother again, and stretched her head from out the bed curtains—"you have never told me whether Malcolm was at Segerstad when you were there this time?"

"If I did not tell you," replied Marie Louise, smiling significantly, "you may conclude, mamma, that it was because I do not know a more tiresome person in the whole world than your beloved nephew, the representative of all the cattle markets; and, therefore, I dislike even to speak of him."

"But was he there, I ask?"

"Yes, and he paid me his homage with his accustomed fascinating amiability."

"Take care, Marie Louise! I have already told you that you have more pride and self-love than is quite becoming; and which will, I fear, lead you into unhappiness. The day may come when you may wish for this homage to be yours again—such a gentleman's residence as Malcolm's-Ness is!"

"And such a gentleman for its owner, as cousin Malcolm, dear mamma!"

"The one may be set against the other. But still——"

"But still," said Marie Louise, ending her mother's sentence, which was purposely left unfinished, "I can be happy and independent without fulfilling mamma's wishes in this respect."

"Oh, as to that, dear child, you know very well——"

"My good dear mamma," said Marie Louise, beseechingly, "it is hard for me to have to remember that in this matter I have not attended to your wishes; it would be also hard for me to be obliged to marry against my inclination, in order that I might be called the mistress of Malcolm's-Ness, and at the same time be ashamed of a husband who cannot speak ten connected sentences in a month."

"He speaks, however, only of discreet things."

"Yes, of his eternal farming, but nothing else does he understand a word about! And I, dearest mamma—pardon me once for all—I will never on these conditions marry and become rich. I am able to support myself."

"And die of hunger if work should fail, and if not, become at last an old maid with spectacles on your nose, knitting stockings and spinning yarn."

"Well and good, my little mamma!" answered Marie Louise, with a merry laugh at the half joking words of her mother. "What we choose ourselves always tastes good—but the light is sinking down in the socket—we will now go to bed, and think no more of Malcolm's-Ness.

* * * * *

The noon-day sun fell brightly on the two myrtle trees, which

Marie Louise had so often plundered to make bride garlands for the young girls of the town. It was two days after the evening that we have above described, and Marie Louise sat again at the table before the only window of the room, busy over the work which she had promised to send home.

Some one knocked at the door.

"Come in!" cried her mother, and threw her Sunday shawl quickly over her shoulders. Marie Louise's usual very tasteful and simple toilette required no improvement; but, as the footsteps of a man fell on her ear, she smoothed with her hands the braids of her hair.

"Have I the honour of seeing Mrs. N——?" said the Engineer Williamson, who appeared as if to-day he would deserve neither the accusation of shyness nor forwardness.

"Yes; we have already made acquaintance through the window," said she, very courteously; "and my daughter" (the engineer bowed to the young lady) "is also personally acquainted with you."

Marie Louise returned the salutation, and offered a seat.

"Nevertheless," said Williamson, in a tone and manner so refined that it pleased Marie Louise particularly, "I do not make use of this acquaintanceship as an excuse for my visit. Only in the quality of a petitioner have I ventured to intrude."

A friendly look from the young lady encouraged Williamson's eloquence more than the straightforward question of her mother, "About what?—probably about the copying?" "No," said he, hastily, although he with difficulty could conquer his repugnance to speaking on the subject. "I would not trouble the young lady with it. It is much too tiresome to go through such rubbish. But perhaps she will not think me quite so bold, if I were to venture to request that she will colour some of my maps and plans for me."

"That I should never dare to undertake, Mr. Engineer," replied Marie Louise; "for I know that it requires extraordinary exactitude for such work."

"I should not have ventured to come with my request," continued Williamson, "if I had not heard of your talent for drawing, and therefore felt sure that you would find it quite easy to do my maps."

"Perhaps I could see one?" asked Marie Louise, who appeared to hesitate between the wish to undertake the work, and the fear of not being able to perform it.

"If you will allow me, I will run over and fetch one that I have just begun."

"If it is agreeable to you—if you are sure that you are not giving yourself useless trouble."

"Oh, I do not fear that!"

Williamson was off like a flash of lightning. The mother looked at her daughter with surprise. "Where did you put your eyes, dear Marie Louise? Do you call him shy or forward to-day? He is as well-bred and well-mannered a young man as one could wish."

"Yes, truly, that he is—and when I think of it now, he appeared to more advantage, on Thursday, when he was speaking to the lady of the house."

"Here he comes back again already. Let us clear all the needle-work away from the table. God grant that you may be able to undertake the maps, my child, for it would be an excellent source of profit."

"That depends upon how much time the work requires, however well he might pay for it. I must beg you, though, mamma, beforehand, not to let me have to receive the money, but to manage it when I am not by."

"Do not fear; I see that he is far too delicate to mention such a thing before you. Such a——. But, hush! here he comes."

Marie Louise laid aside her work, drew the curtain aside, and assisted the young surveyor to spread out the maps, over which they both bent—he describing and she listening.

It was a pleasant feeling to Williamson, and one that rewarded him for much past labour, to have now, at the side of a young and beautiful woman, to retrace his way in these maps over roads that he had lately traversed with such trouble and difficulty. He lingered as long as he could find a pretext for at every point, until inwardly lamenting the quick flight of the minutes, he let the maps roll up together again, whilst his looks sought those of the young girl.

Marie Louise leant her elbow against the window-frame, reflecting, and as Williamson contemplated her, he felt that his former "but" had vanished. She might do or say what she would, he had never seen so charming, and, at the same time, so dignified and unassuming a woman.

"Well, then, Mr. Engineer, if I should attempt this and not succeed, could the mischief be remedied?"

"Very easily; I can then copy the map again."

"In that case," added Marie Louise, as she made a slight grimace, "Mr. Engineer would not be a great gainer. If, however, you will allow me, I will try to copy the whole map. Should I then not be successful, you will lose nothing by it."

"But you, young lady, would lose your time.

"I fear that, under any circumstances; but one learns nothing without sacrificing something.—I am quite determined to try."

"I cannot sufficiently thank you, under any circumstances. But I should be in the highest degree obliged, if you would allow me to give you a little advice at the beginning, which might be of great service to you."

"Very willingly, if the engineer will be so good. For a few days I shall be busy with some work which I have already in hand, but next week we could begin our undertaking."

Who now was more enraptured than Williamson! Meanwhile, that he might not appear intrusive, now that the business was ended, he took his hat and withdrew, leaving behind a very agreeable impression on both mother and daughter.

CHAPTER VI.

LETTER OF ENGINEER WILLIAMSON TO A FRIEND AT HOME.

"ONLY listen, thou old Goth, who lingerest on the musty threshold of our forefathers, rather than breathe a breath of strange air; hast thou ever considered what an absurdity thou desirest, in wishing that I, for the edification of the family at home, should spend my valuable time not merely in writing letters, but, good heavens! whole epistles, detailing the life of a poor surveyor? If, however, I were literally to relate how on this or that day I passed over a new boundary line, measured this or that road, or allotted this or that piece of ground to Peter, Olle, Andrew, or John, all this, I should be told, was far too tedious to be set down on paper, and that something interesting was wanted, something, as people say now-a-days, "in the form of a sketch."

But these favourite "sketches" are not to be found hanging on the twigs that I have to break my way through in many of the paths I traverse, and I could wish that I were able to describe how wearisome and unpleasant, in every respect except the earning of money, are these journeys and this business; how miserably one lives in these peasants' huts among the mountains;

how often one is wet to the skin, with muddy boots that one can scarce drag after one, and ragged as a gipsy ere one can reach the desired haven, which is often only a smoky room, with a pan of fried bacon without even a glass of grog to warm one and give a relish to the food.

Yet in spite of all this, so long as good temper, health, and cash are to be secured, the surveyor can bear his fatigues. Something he must do, and a free life in wood and plain agrees better with my disposition than to sit chained like thee to a writing-desk. Therefore will I send you all something of a "sketch" that shall raise a smile, if possible on your long faces.

Something more than a month ago—it was my last job before I came into the town—I had to finish the measuring of an island which lay about three miles from my station, and set off for the purpose one foggy morning with one of my assistants, Carl, and a rower.

Among the principles which I cherish most, and from which I have never yet departed, is that of never setting out on a voyage in autumn without taking with me at least three corked and sealed "bottle" companions. This precaution I observed also on this occasion, and sat quietly in my boat, and thought, "Come what will, storm, contrary winds, or calm, I have still my grog and my pipe in reserve, with which I can revive my spirits."

But what does man know of the result of his foolish reckonings! I beg of you all to trim your lamp, and lend an attentive ear.

"A boat to the sea-ward, which is coming straight towards us!" said my brave old steersman, and pointed in the direction where another son of the sea was ploughing his way in our direction.

"Halt!" said I. "It is probably some one who wishes to speak with me," and shortly afterwards I perceived, though I fain would have mistrusted my eyes, an old acquaintance, one of those cronies that we stumble upon without very well knowing their names, and with whom we have made acquaintance one knows not how, at some moment when, with a glass in our hand, we have not been very particular as to whom we gave the pledge of brotherhood.

Such a "brother" stood now in the rocking boat before me, a fellow not altogether unknown to me by reputation—namely, a certain celebrated brandy-loving advocate, Pellander, who, during the last quarter of a century, has immortalized his name partly through the number of lawsuits that he has unravelled, and partly through his extraordinary dexterity in consuming all description of liquids.

"Mr. 'Gineer Will'son!" called out my lively friend, who indulged his propensity during three-fourths of his time, and during this happy period abridged by one-half the titles and names of his acquaintances—"'Gineer Will'son—brother, I ought to say—ah! brother of my heart, how are you?"

"Uncommonly bad, my good Mr. Pellander. We have regular dog-weather."

"Sad, very sad! But as it is always better when one suffers in company, so—if you have no objection, brother Will'son—so, let us get the boats better alongside! I also want to go to Binham Island, to Andrew Anderson. You have been paid, I think, already?" These last words Pellander addressed to his boatman, and before the latter could bring out a long and astonished "No," the advocate had sprung into my boat.

With difficulty I succeeded in concealing from his searching glance my provision of bottles. I have already told you that I had three amiable "friends" in my company; but as friends of the same mind become at last very tiresome to each other, fate had sent me, as a change, a little diversity of opinion in the form of the advocate Pellander.

"I ought, according to the agreement, to receive nine marks," said the man in the empty boat.

"Good, my friend; I will deduct them from the next account I have against you."

What was to be done? With or without my will must I submit to the spell of Pellander's domination. The fact was that he had got a trace of my flight; and as he thought that he could thus get his own passage free, he had only taken a boat in order to fall in with me at a convenient spot.

"Have you nothing to warm one, brother?" asked Pellander, who, I could observe, had already consumed the provision that he had himself brought.

"Only a little, as good as nothing; and this little is irrevocably destined to enliven my evening, after being out all day. Do you understand me, Mr. Pellander?"

"If my brother is too niggardly to offer me a glass of grog, he need not be so haughty as if he did not remember that we have taken the pledge of brotherhood, and that on an occasion —brother Will'son will remember it well—when far grander fellows than himself begged this favour of me."

"I remember it very well," replied I, respectfully; "and it arises only out of a proper feeling, if I, as so young a man, hesitate to apply the name of 'brother' to one so far above me in both years and merit."

"Oh! your obedient servant, your obedient servant! that matters little—my brother can then call me 'uncle.' "*

I declared that I was greatly honoured by this new favour, but resolved to make as little use of it as possible.

When we reached Andrew Anderson's, we found, it is true, a little preparation for us, after peasant fashion; but during the next day's business the store of provisions was so nearly exhausted, that Pellander fetched deep sighs over the empty dishes and pitchers, and was greatly delighted when the day of departure came; but suddenly, in the middle of the previous night, so tremendous a storm, or rather hurricane arose, that a passage of three leagues back in an open boat would have been the same as intentionally bidding adieu to life. As I have told you that previous to the breaking out of the storm it was high time to think of returning home, you may imagine our condition when the storm, instead of abating the third and fourth days, increased to such a pitch that, what with impatience and want, we were quite in despair. Cold and rain, fog and howling wind in every corner! It was such a storm, that one lost both sight and hearing if one ventured to put one's nose out of doors.

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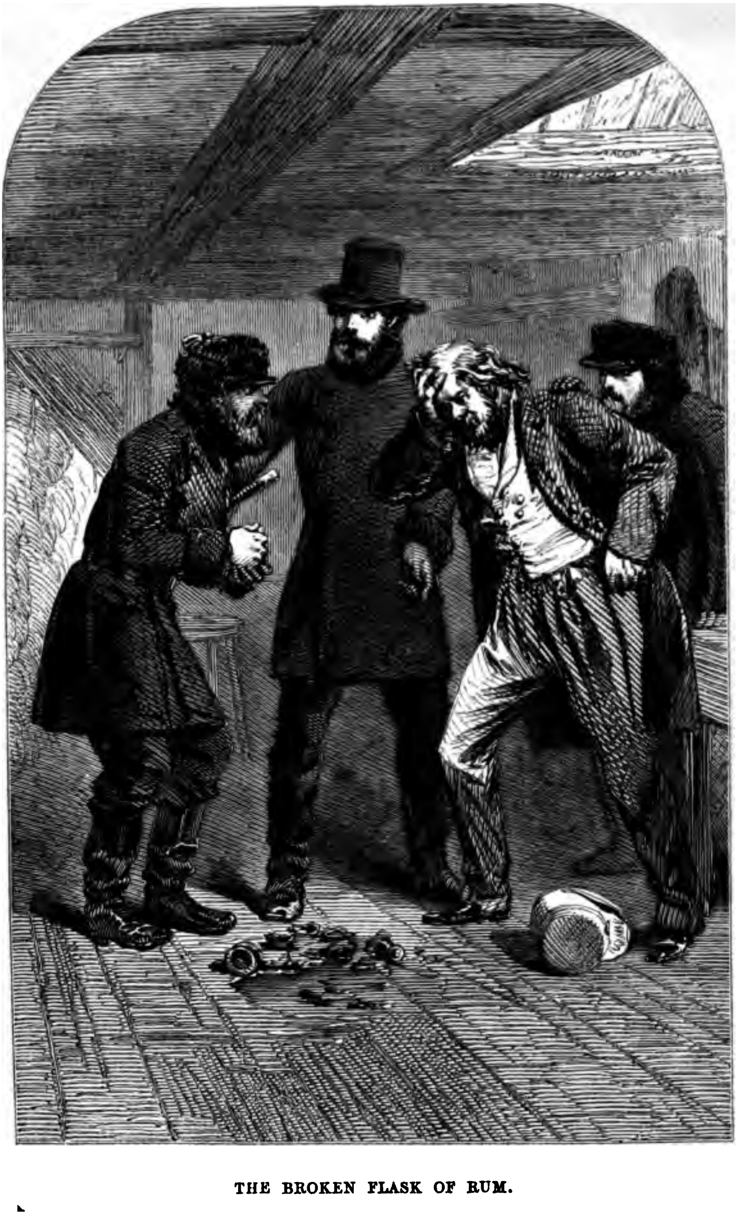
* The name of "uncle," or "aunt," is often applied as a term of endearment by young people to friends much older than themselves.

As a last resource, to warm and enliven us in the cold and damp room, which I and my people, with Pellander and a son of the peasant had in common made our sitting room, I had with admirable prudence and management, and not without a thousand difficulties, succeeded in preserving my last flask of rum; for even were we not to be frozen to death, nor destined to live through another Robinson Crusoe's life, we could easily perceive, by the state of the sea, that it would not be passable until the next week. Economy, too, was all the more necessary a virtue, since, added to our other disasters, we had a very scanty supply of fire-wood. "Uncle" Pellander, poor soul, had become so thin that his coat could wrap nearly half way round his body again. His face had lost its radiant glance, and bore the stamp of the deep sorrow which he felt at passing his time in so strict a fast.

Reason, Patience, and Time! these three excellent rules of life, which formed the groundwork of my lexicon, were long my consolation. But everything has its limits, even Time—at least, to us mortals; wherefore, it follows very clearly that Patience was at last at an end. I recited Valerias — thou knowest that he has sung this god-like gift, Patience, but it afforded me little comfort; and I call upon the whole tribe of poets to confess whether they would have preserved an ounce of it, had they been partakers in the misfortunes which crowned all our disasters.

Our ancestors were great men—who could almost do without anything! Afterwards, without one knowing where the seed was sown, sprang up the tree of knowledge and desire, under whose boughs we, their puny descendants, seek shelter. Wants increase like locusts, and we are not ashamed to confess our degeneracy. Holberg said often in his "Peter Paars"—"without beer and bread the hero is nothing." He forgot to add "in a storm," by which we may judge that Holberg wrote this heroic poem in summer time; and we ask, if the hero is nothing without food and drink, what must the ordinary man, in such circumstances, be? Alas!—even less than nothing. It is remarkable, however, that the nearer I approach my catastrophe, the higher rises my desire to find distinguished examples in real life. I stick to history, and look upon the heaven-directed Napoleon and his expedition to Russia. Not even he—that is, he, represented in his army, could stand out against cold, hunger, and thirst; he fell, deprived of all but honour. Could he, however, contemplate, in philosophical repose at Elba, his loss of power and the fall of his greatest works? No! yet once again rose up the eagle into the cloud of heaven, until Jupiter, whose image he wished to represent on earth, checked with his lightning his flight, and cast him down, stunned for ever, on St. Helena's rock. Here, perhaps, he shed tears to the fall of the herculean edifice which he had seen rise and fall, tears (for all things, from the greatest to the least, acquire their true value in time



THE BROKEN FLASK OF RUM.

of need) such as *we* shed when Carl, the rascal, let fall to the ground our last flask of rum!

Perhaps you will consider this a very simple and unassuming introduction to an affair of so much importance? But when the storm of passion is over, one can speak calmly of the past. I remember still the tears that Pellander mingled with the stream which flowed over the floor of our room, and as he sucked in the fumes of the spirit and perhaps something besides, he exclaimed: "Alas, alas, brother! How couldst thou have the heart to conceal from me this treasure? See now the results of thy selfish calculations!—hadst thou only given the bottle into my charge, it would have come, at all events, to a more worthy end. And thou, lubber!"—and here Pellander raised his voice, and his clenched fist danced over Carl's nose—"thou, lubber, standing there with the broken bottle in thy hand, gaping at me—oh, were I but thy master!"

It was only by a quick spring on one side that Carl saved himself.

But our want and our misery were only increased, and after the third day's diet on herrings, oat-cake, and fresh water, we were deprived of what little remains of strength and courage were left to us.

At last a day dawned, when the rage of the elements was appeased. We were almost obliged to carry Pellander to the boat—so great an inroad had this week's fasting made on his physical man. As we set foot on land again, however, he made a solemn vow to restore the damage as speedily as possible, and on the following day I found he had honourably fulfilled his vow; since I met him quite reconciled again to his fate, and after his usual manner, he thanked "brother Will'son" for his good company. And here ends the "sketch" of uncle Pellander and the last flask of rum.

My friends at home have perhaps expected something quite different; for instance, a description of my life in the town, my courting and its success, &c.—but every one is familiar with "sketches" of this kind, that is to say, of all that goes on in a little town in which a civilized young man has settled down; I will not say like a hawk among the doves, since this comparison would on one side be quite unjust, for I am far too timid to play the hawk; but as for the doves, they have here the greatest possible resemblance to tame ones. There is, in fact, but one solitary wild wood-pigeon here, who lives amongst the rest free and proud. Yet I must set aside the comparison of the latter to a dove, in order to introduce her to you as my neighbour in a bow-windowed room opposite my own—since you must know that I also dwell in an apartment of this description. I will not describe the beautiful Marie Louise, for all descriptions of beauty are so worn out, that one must give them up. Suffice it to say, that she is a creature whose appearance, both from the window and when seen near, awakens most indescribable feelings. I have succeeded in gaining admission into her home. She has even begun to work at copying a map of mine—for she is poor, and I, happy man, have obtained permission to give her instructions, speak to her, and sit by her.

You may perceive, however, that I am not in love with her, or I could not write about her. I am glad to be able to say of her, that she is as much of an angel as a mortal woman can be: amiable, good, industrious, and yet not one of the class of lilies with drooping heads which require supporting, for she is able to support herself.

At this moment her beautiful arm is extended from behind the curtains—my heart and head are too warm for me to write any more. I have seen this arm near, and know that it has no equal.

And now you know all that you want to know. My business is going on well, except that I now and then waste too much time. But I must improve! After Christmas the days are longer, and it is easier to work.

Farewell, farewell! my dear friends at home—alas! my beloved mother—no longer can your lips relax into a smile, as you listen to a letter from me! Yet my friends and relations, you wish to hear tidings of me, and God bless you for it. My heart is so capacious, that I believe I could take in the whole world.

Yours ever,
WILLIAM.

Alas, alas! what voice from the abodes of darkness is that which I hear quarrelling with Carl out there! "I tell you, you rascal, 'Gineer Will'son is at home, I saw him at the window!" Heavens! Pellander! he comes always like an evil spirit, and now, of all times, must he make his appearance? My worthy neighbours to see that I have such an acquaintance! Here he is! and at this minute she is drawing back the curtains—I wish —the deuce take the fellow! What unlucky chance has brought him to this town?"

CHAPTER VII.

How blest am I—see, in thousand forms,
Dances each beautiful ideal round me.
RUNEBERG.

"YOUR servant, brother Will'son—thanks, thanks, for our late merry life in Binham Island." With these words, the advocate Pellander, who wore his usual leather pouch across his breast, took his seat, without waiting for an invitation, and Williamson was somewhat relieved to see that by chance he had chosen the chair which stood farthest from the window.

Pellander's face to-day bore more than usually signs of the ill effects of intemperance. He looked like a man who was ready to sacrifice even coat and waistcoat to the gratification of his propensity, and Pellander's propensity was at all times powerful.

"What procures our town the honour of so gracious a visit?" asked the engineer.

"A little business, brother Will'son," answered the advocate, as he winked his eyes, "a little profitable business for a wealthy client, whose acquaintance I have lately made. Only just think, a man in this town here has summoned the mighty lord and potentate—that is, the land proprietor, squire Malcolm M——, of Malcolm's-Ness, before the court-sessions of this place, about some cheating affair. Aforesaid high magnate, according to the assertion of the complainant, has sold a pair of horses as faultless, and these are now found so full of vices that ——"

"Oh, I understand," interrupted the engineer, "the affair is complicated! The great man has therefore chosen an ambassador that will make him the envy of the whole world, a jurist who has few equals; in short, I congratulate the lord magnate potentate, land proprietor, on the happy results of his law-suit—for that is already certain, since "uncle" Pellander is to conduct it."

"Oh, brother Will'son, not so much flattery! It is true that I am now and then fortunate, or rather, it has seldom happened that I have lost a suit. Your business, brother Will'son, is to lay open new estates, and mine—excuse the comparison—is to lay open new lawsuits, when they have been left in the dark abyss of oblivion and forgetfulness."

"Yes, so it is," said Williamson, who was led on, against his will, to amuse himself with this administrator of the law; "so it is; but it is not given to every one to be a genius."

"Deeply and truly thought and spoken! That is a fine phrase—it is not given to every one to be a genius! But brother Will'son may console himself that he has succeeded in deceiving a man whom no one else has ever deceived; I mean lately, when we took that little journey together, and when brother Will'son—I say it openly, that it showed talent—contrived to smuggle a good friend through my watchful toll-house, who, through Carl, suffered shipwreck afterwards."

"Yes, indeed, I was punished for it afterwards! My intentions were good, however, for I meant it for the enlivening of the following days. But excuse me, good 'uncle,' if, to my grief, I must be sincere enough to observe, that just at present I am so overwhelmed with business, that——"

"It matters not; brother Will'son need not put himself out of the way; I can amuse myself very well alone. But see what a pretty young lady there is at the window opposite! I should like to see her a little nearer."

"Impossible! that will never do!" and as Pellander was in the act of establishing his rosy countenance at the window-pane, Williamson suddenly drew down the curtains. Perhaps this movement, inconsiderately made, was not very prudent, since it is certain that the quick manœuvre, as well as Pellander's face, was remarked by the neighbour opposite.

The advocate's stay in the town lasted only over another day: and as Williamson heard him for the last time say, "Farewell, brother of my heart, 'Gineer Will'son!" he felt an inexpressible lightening of his heart. He hoped that now all further acquaintanceship with this person was cut off for ever, and he rejoiced at it all the more, since, being accustomed in general to be very particular in the choice of his companions, he was fearful that those who did not know him well might judge ill of the intimacy into which he had fallen with a person of so ambiguous a character as Pellander.

Williamson's fears were afterwards fulfilled; but now he soon forgot both the visit and the visitor, for his mind was filled with a very different impression, and in proportion as this gradually acquired a definite colouring, so did he remain at home busied with his work, and accepted only those invitations where he hoped to meet the inhabitant of the bow-windowed room. Should he discover, however, through a very artful system of espionage, that she would not be of the party, he became so busy that ten messages would not shake him from his purpose, nor induce him to leave his place at the writing-table, to which he was held chained by an agreeable sort of magnetic influence.

It would, meanwhile, be infringing on truth were we to insinuate that he sat there inactive and dreaming, looking at mere passing shadows. Now and then he did this, but the greater part of his time he felt his former capability for hard work returned to him. It was so pleasant to be able to sit at work so near to her who had also to work for her bread. The new year had not yet portioned out to him its unequal inheritance of sad and happy days, ere he began to think that it could bring no sorrow equal to the joy of having to work for both. Perhaps from the very first he had nourished the germs of the feeling which gave rise to this thought. Certain it is, that it needed two full months for these to take root and put forth blossoms, assisted principally by the instructions given in map-drawing. Marie Louise became soon so skilful, that she could do without assistance; but as Williamson had got accustomed to running over the way to show her how this or that was to be done, he could not leave off the good habit, but took the liberty of—either behind her chair or seated by her side—watching the progress of her beautiful hand.

An open homage, however, such as would justify the little town in considering him engaged, had not yet taken place; since, as far as they knew—and in this town every one knew everything—he had never been at his opposite neighbours' in his black dress-coat, nor still less in his uniform; from beginning to end he had only worn his brown frock-coat! And the conclusion derived from such ingenious observations was, that Williamson's visits were caused entirely by the maps, and not by her who was drawing them.

As Christmas approached, our engineer would have gladly manifested his gratitude in other ways than merely through the small sum of money which the mother of Marie Louise had received for her. He did not venture, however, in the fear of offending her whom he was so anxious to please. During the days just before and after Christmas, too, he did not dare visit her so often, as an accumulation of needlework claimed all her time. She had herself mentioned this, and he was obliged to satisfy himself with his observations through window and curtains.

"Now, my good Mr. Engineer," said the old counsellor's wife, who saw through these matters sharper than the others, "do you know that we are thinking of having a little entertainment on New-Year's eve. Would the engineer be so good as to let us make use of his parlour, which joins ours by folding doors?"

"Most willingly, my dear Mistress Utter. But what pleasant guests should I then see in my room?"

"Oh, guests enough! a whole heap of them! so that you can dance and make merry as you will. I like having young people at my house, and Miss Marie Louise is the sweetest flower in the whole garland."

"In that, I am of your opinion," and Williamson's heart beat high with joy. Marie Louise would walk about his room, sit on his chairs, see his papers, his books, and his writing-table. How dear would all these things now become to him! He was quite foolish with joy.

In a little party which took place between Christmas and the new year, he met the object of his thoughts, and complained to her that it was so long since he had seen her.

"If Mr. Engineer had wished to visit us, the way was short enough," answered Marie Louise, with the most friendly look that he had yet received.

"But you were more than usually busy, and I thought I understood a little hint which consigned me to banishment for an indefinite time."

"No, indeed, it was not so intended," added Marie Louise, blushing.

"Then I may understand——"

"That as no decree of banishment was issued——" and a significant smile finished her sentence.

Williamson bowed, and his radiant looks showed how much meaning he ventured to attach to these words. Marie Louise, however, possessed a great talent for cooling the warmth of his feelings when it rose too high.

"I shall be leaving home after Twelfth-day," said she, in a tone of indifference.

"You are going away?"

"Yes, for a little time, in the country—I was obliged to promise it."

Williamson's joy was annihilated.

"And you stay away, perhaps, until the spring?" Williamson trembled to think that this was the time when his own business would take him away.

"No so long, I believe,—it is, however, quite undecided."

A gentleman came to ask Marie Louise to dance, and Williamson, who had forgotten to secure her hand as a partner in the course of their conversation, saw her stand up with another. At this moment he was not disposed to ask another to waltz with him, and the agreeable engineer, on whom all the mothers were reckoning for their daughters at this the first regular dance which had taken place since he came into the town, went and sat down at the card-table with counsellor Utter and two other gentlemen."

"What in Heaven's name is the matter with our engineer?" said Mistress Utter to Marie Louise, who a short time after sought a place by the side of her friendly old neighbour.

"Is something the matter with him?"

"Yes, indeed; for he who is so fond of dancing, has gone and sat down at the card-table. Has he not asked you to dance?"

"No, most certainly not."

"Dear! so, then, you were speaking to him just now of something else. He is a good, uncommonly good man, that engineer of ours! A man, my good young lady, who has not his like in the whole town—regular in his work and in all his doings and habits—straightforward and industrious—a right estimable young man. But do I see right?—yes truly, here he comes! Mr. Engineer! Mr. Engineer! just come here! As I have a certain degree of right to keep guardianship over you, you must let me know, my dear sir, why you have gone over to the card-table?"

"Because," said Williamson, with a quick glance at Marie Louise,—"because I was too much lost in thought to be able to act. I intended to have asked a lady to dance, and some one got before me."

"And was your pleasure in dancing consequently at an end?" remarked Mistress Utter, whilst Marie Louise busied herself in fastening a bow on her dress, which had not the least intention of getting loose.

"Not quite at an end, but as I must entertain myself with something, I thought I would try my luck in another direction. That has not been any more favourable, so I have left it."

"So!—and you have been losing?"

"I have paid my fee as apprentice, and discovered that I shall never become a master in the art."

"Is that not praiseworthy, Miss Marie Louise," said the old lady, turning to her, "to leave the game when one is unlucky? I know many who would have been stirred up to take their revenge, instead of being satisfied to retire prudently with a lightened purse."

"In order to go on playing when one was a loser," said Marie Louise, "the passion for play must be very strong."

"I do not think that is necessary," replied Williamson. "Since without having the slighest inclination to gaming, the vexation one feels at losing may create the desire to repair the loss again, and in the case of long continued ill-luck, this may almost amount to a passion—so that in this matter I agree with Mistress Utter."

"Mr. Engineer then prides himself on his victory over himself," said Marie Louise, smiling.

"And why not? It was not effected without difficulty. But now it is gained I shall in future make it a point not to sit down to a card-table again, unless I am forced by others, or from inclination."

"What else could lead you to play?" asked the old lady, laughing.

"Why, without being forced by others, or from any inclination, one may sit down to play for the sake of getting rid of some disagreeable fancies from which one cannot otherwise extricate oneself."

"Excuse me, my friends, the burgomaster's wife is beckoning to me." And the old lady set off into the next room.

Williamson took the empty seat.

Marie Louise did not avoid his looks. Both blushed. She understood what Williamson had meant, and seemed glad that he had said it so openly.

"Are you engaged also for the next waltz?"

"Yes, and for more than will be danced probably."

"And you have none for me?"

"I could not be unpolite to the gentleman who came before you, Mr. Engineer."

"That is true—and there remains nothing for me but to try my luck again at the card-table."

"Then you really will not dance with any of the other ladies?"—over Williamson's brow flashed a deep red—"or," added Marie Louise, after enjoying his vexation for a few seconds, "perhaps a quadrille will content you instead of a waltz, as I have one disengaged?"

Before Williamson could answer, one of the most distinguished partners of the evening came up and asked her for this very quadrille.

"Thank you, I am already engaged," answered Marie Louise, quickly.

"To me?" whispered Williamson, when they were left undisturbed. "Ah, Marie Louise, how can I thank you enough!"

"I do not know that there is anything to thank me for. Such a dance-loving person as I am does not willingly sit still; I was afraid no one might ask me."

"Must you always make a point," said Williamson, with warmth, "of having half a dozen freezing words at hand, to cool down the joy of a few friendly ones?"

The music began to play, and Marie Louise drew on her gloves

"You are still an answer in my debt young lady," continued Williamson, as he arose and offered his arm. But during the promenade to their places, she said, in a friendly tone: "I shall no longer keep any accounts. All that has passed before the quadrille must be considered as balanced and settled."

"But," objected Williamson, "it is not yet begun, so that you have plenty of time to answer the question."

"Never expect, however, that a young lady should remember a question whilst they are waiting for the beginning of a quadrille, for that would show that you know nothing about them."

Her manner and look were so bewitching as she spoke these words, that Williamson on his side was left an answer in her debt. Uninterruptedly he followed her slightest movements as she lightly and gracefully swam through the dance, and each time that she returned to her place, some playful joke played on her beautiful lips.

Our engineer gave up all hopes of being able this time to get in a serious word. "But I must wait," thought he; "the party on New-Year's eve will be more favourable."

CHAPTER VIII.

He looked back: already much of heaven lay behind; but still more had he before him.—SCHWAB.

"BLESS my soul! is that the way to carry a tray. What are you thinking about?" cried the counsellor's wife, as she met Carl in the midst of a run up stairs full speed. "Do you not see, blockhead, that all the candlesticks are leaning on one side? If I had not come in time they would all have been down to the ground."

"Heaven forbid!" said Carl. "I should have taken good care of them."

"Yes, yes, all very well—but listen now: have you been told how they are to be placed? Let me hear."

"Well, four on the bureau, and two on each table excepting the corner table, where they must be placed among the fiddlers, and then candles in all the sconces."

"Yes, those you must fetch from below?

"Those I fetched yesterday?"

"What do you mean? The lamps you got together, but the candles I have scarcely any of."

"But I bought them yesterday—and, moreover, wax lights."

"Wax lights!—who sent you, then?" asked Mistress Utter, somewhat angrily.

"Mr. Engineer."

"So, so; he thought my candles would not do!" And long before Carl, had the old lady herself mounted the stairs to the upper floor, where Williamson was busy here and there, arranging everything most carefully.

"My little Engineer, what does all this mean? You have been buying wax lights for all the sconces—that I certainly should not have done, for not even the burgomaster had wax lights, even last year, when his eldest daughter was married; and I must confess, Mr. Engineer, that I certainly should not like to have it said that the Utters had become proud in their old days."

"My good dear Mistress Utter!—yet, stop; let me this last day of the year, lay aside all formality; and since you and the good counsellor treat me more like a son than a lodger, let me, in future, make use of the familiar names of 'Uncle' and 'Aunt,' when I address you."

"Thanks, thanks, that is a good thought," said the old lady.

curtseying and simpering; "and now and then I shall be saying, 'My Little Engineer,'" and here she received a most affectionate embrace, which she returned in right motherly fashion. "But now," continued she, "you must account for the wax-lights—no shuffling of the cards, if you please."

"Far from it! I was intending to explain, when another idea came into my head. It is really only out of politeness towards the ladies, who would have to sit on the benches, so as to protect their dresses from tallow-grease; and I wanted to arrange this little surprise without Aunt Gretchen knowing anything about it, since, as my room is to be used for the festival, I must give my share towards the lighting of it."

"Well, then, keep your dear wax-lights," answered the old lady, now conquered. "I know very well for whom the tallow candles were not good enough, although the poor thing would be glad always to have plenty, even of them."

Williamson became red as the tulip whose stem he was trying to support; he pretended, however, not to understand the allusion of his old friend.

"I am rather uneasy about her," continued she, as she dusted with her apron the already dusted looking-glass.

"About whom?" asked Williamson, without turning his head.

"Why, about our neighbours over the way there; for, you see, two or three days before Christmas, they actually had no store of firewood in the house to warm themselves with."

"Who said so?" asked the engineer, quite unable to suppress his emotion.

"Well, those have said it who know it: that is, their landlady."

"She must surely have told an untruth."

"No, indeed; she is a most respectable person; and I should never repeat any gossiping. It is, besides, all the more certain, because I myself lent them some wood, or rather— but this is all between ourselves—I lent their landlady, Mistress Leander, some, that she might lend it to them again. However, two days ago, they got two cart-loads from Segerstad, and I had my wood back again directly; they are always so particular."

"Good God!" sighed Williamson, who now understood the cause of his own banishment during the previous week.

"Yes, God is good!" continued the old lady. "Miss Marie Louise will be an excellent wife for some good man."

Williamson could not refrain from seizing the hand of the old woman. There was so much real goodness, so much sincere and warm sympathy in her words, that he could not pretend not to understand her. He looked at her kindly, and, without a word being spoken, he felt he had a confidantc. With a smile on her lips, the old counsellor's wife tripped down to her saucepans again.

Almost as uneasily as a bridegroom on his wedding day, did Williamson await the beginning of the evening's proceedings. His own room seemed as if it would never be arranged rightly. Now he put everything that was not wanted away, that it might look as if he were orderly, and the next minute papers and books were brought out again, that the place might not look stiff and formal; in short, he altered it so often, that the inner room was downright untidy when the first of the guests began to arrive. Before Marie Louise appeared, however, his mind had recovered its equipoise, so that he was able to remedy all defects.

At this yearly festival at the Utters' there was always much merriment and freedom from constraint. This evening, however, it was more brilliant than usual; and everything, from the wax-lights and punch-bowls with the golden lemon-slices floating about to the well-fattened capons and sugared tarts, betokened simplicity and plenty in their arrangements and preparations.

Although the mother of Marie Louise was invited to all the entertainments in the town, yet she never went out, either, as they said, from pride, or for want of a suitable wardrobe. Others, judging more kindly, presumed that long-continued sorrow and straitened circumstances had disposed her mind for solitude.

However this may be, Marie Louise came, as usual, this evening, alone; and perhaps it was this custom of going out unaccompanied which gave to her deportment and manners a certain security and freedom which many ascribed to a feeling of superiority, and which went beyond the constraint to which the other young girls of the town were accustomed.

Marie Louise wore to-day a dress, that not merely called forth the envy, but almost produced a commotion in the circle of ladies. The whole town knew that "the ladies of the bow-windowed room," as they were sometimes designated, the whole week previous to Christmas had not had a single log of firewood that was not borrowed—and now she was wearing a dress of violet silk!

"No,—consistency in all things," said the clergyman's wife, a little newly married lady, who could not bear that her black levantine bridal dress should be eclipsed by another, especially as it had to do duty for many years at innumerable weddings, christenings, and burials.

"Marie Louise received this dress from the Baroness Segerstad as a Christmas present," remarked one of those rarely found good creatures who feel hurt at any ebullition of envy. "She got it for teaching the little girl to draw so nicely, and because the baroness besides this always treats Marie Louise quite as a sister."

"That may be, Ma'am'selle I——; yet it does not quite become Miss Marie Louise to wear such a dress—that you must confess. I think she was smart enough at the last ball in her gauze dress."

"But since she has had the dress given her, she ought to wear it."

"In my opinion, it would have been better to have sold it to some one whom it would have suited better."

At this moment approached Marie Louise, as beautiful as Hebe herself, and playing with the lace of the richly embroidered scarf which was thrown over her shoulders and fell over the envied dress; she drew near the ladies as her name still hung on their lips. Irresistibly the young married lady made way for her, and the good-natured Ma'am'selle I—— was so kind as to give up to her her own place.

"Dearest Marie Louise, what a sweet perfume is wafted from the flowers in your hair," said the clergyman's wife, with a soft flattering voice. "Where have you got such beautiful roses and such lovely geraniums? We are in the middle of winter."

"Yes—am I not to be envied," answered Marie Louise with a radiant smile. "I have our good hostess Mistress Utter to thank for the attention."

"But the bouquet in your girdle," continued the lady, "is even more beautiful! Look, Ma'am'selle I——, that is just such a wall-flower as we admired in the engineer's room—it is really very pretty."

"I think so too, let it have grown where it may," added Marie Louise, coldly, and then turned to address some friendly words to another neighbour. Williamson, who had undertaken to assist "Uncle Utter" in doing the honours, came at this moment into the room, as Mistress Utter herself was leading Marie Louise across it, and the impression which she made on him this evening by her whole appearance was such as he could conceal neither under the forms of custom nor the restraints of politeness.

Quite incapable of speaking to her, he merely bowed at a distance, an incivility which quite offended Marie Louise, especially as the clergyman's wife said, pointedly, "I really believe that Engineer Williamson does not recognise Miss Marie Louise in her elegant dress this evening."

This ill-natured remark sent the blood to Marie Louise's cheeks for a second or two. Williamson saw the effect without suspecting the cause, but as he felt sure that the words spoken had referred to himself, it only increased still more his confusion. He tried to summon up courage to approach her, seeing how laughable it was not to do so, but not succeeding, he entered into conversation with a lady at his side whom he scarcely knew. Suddenly, however, in the midst of his confused talk, which, to tell the truth, not a little surprised the old lady to whom it was addressed, Williamson darted forward—for the old counsellor began at that moment to draw the resin over his bow, a sign that the waltzing was about to begin. Alas! alas! was he then again too late!

Williamson shot through the room to the corner where he knew Marie Louise was sitting. Look at her he could not venture after offending her, perhaps, with his strange greeting. With eyes cast down, all he could say was—"May I beg the honour of the first waltz with you?"

"Thank you; with pleasure!" answered quite a different voice from that of Marie Louise, and as Williamson suddenly loooked up, he saw himself face to face with the clergyman's bride. Marie Louise sat at her side, but pretended not to see the engineer, who, in the meantime, quite in despair, saw too late how dangerous it is to ask a lady to dance without looking at her.

But he felt immediately that the mistake could not be remedied, and as it seemed to him now that it would be a rudeness to engage Marie Louise for the next waltz, he was obliged to go away without receiving from her a single look.

The state of mind of our engineer was in no wise improved, as he saw immediately afterwards an unknown guest led by the burgomaster up to Marie Louise, and introduced as a partner for the unlucky waltz. This person, named Lieutenant von Walden, and a relation of the burgomaster's, appeared, in the eyes of a rival, as a most distinguished ball-room "beau." He led out his partner, if not, better than the engineer—who was quite a master in the art of dancing—yet in so graceful and polished a manner, that the whole of the sitting public who adorned the sofas and benches were ready to waltz with him through life were it required.

As the dancing couples rested in the middle of the room, Williamson happened to catch, as it fell, a sprig of mignonette, out of the bouquet which Marie Louise had fastened into her girdle, and which, although the counsellor had not exactly said so, yet from a hint he had given, she knew to have come from Williamson.

"You have lost something, I think," said he, as he handed to her the fresh and beautiful sprig.

"It does not matter," said Marie, indifferently, and let the poor mignonette fall to the ground, where it was soon trodden on by the foot of Lieutenant von Walden.

It was now the engineer's turn to change colour; he felt convinced that she suspected the bouquet to be a present from him. She had even worn his flowers, but was now ready to throw them away in contempt. Without knowing it, he had stood nearer to the gate of heaven than he had dared to believe; but that it was now shut against him, he could plainly see, from the manner in which the representative of his love was neglected.

Williamson made an excuse for ending the waltz sooner than his partner quite expected. Out of humour and vexed, he threw himself on a sofa which stood in the bow-windowed room, which was now empty, the elderly ladies and gentlemen having retired to the hostess's own parlour, and taken their places at the card-tables.

After a short time Williamson heard voices in Carl's little apartment, which had this evening been transformed into a dressing-room for the ladies. Was he deceived? Did he not hear the voice of Marie Louise?

The door stood half open.

"Be so good," said she to the maid—for it was really herself—"be so good as to tie my sandal for me. It is not quite broken, but I feel that it ought to be better fastened."

"So, there—it is done," answered the maid, officiously; "and I will also take out a little sprig of fir which has got entangled in the trimming of your dress."

"There are no fir twigs in the room."

"Perhaps on the steps you have caught up one—but I see now, it is a little sprig of mignonette."

"I must have lost it out of my girdle!" said Marie Louise, earnestly, "but it shall not have so sad a fate as the other."

She took the sprig, dusted it with her gloves, and fastened it among the flowers in her bouquet, where it had formerly been.

Had Williamson seen this little scene?

It was only ten steps from the sofa to the door—and a lover has sharp eyes.

In quite another mood, and led by an impulse of boldness which restored him his usual assurance of manner, he returned to the dancing room, and placed himself in the entrance through which Marie Louise must pass.

"My dear young lady, pardon me if I detain you a moment; but I must honourably confess that in my waltzing engagement just now I was so unfortunate as to make a terrible mistake, which I suffered from so much, that I am ready to confess my awkwardness on the spot. I do not know whether you noticed to whom my words ought to have been addressed, or whether my bow itself, in my confusion, went too far to the left."

"No," answered Marie Louise, as they walked together to the end of the room, where she sat down, "I did not suspect that you had made any mistake."

"Then," said Williamson, significantly, "my conduct must have appeared to you more than merely laughable."

"Neither laughable nor anything else. I did not see anything that even aroused my attention."

"In this case"—Williamson bowed with glowing cheeks—"I must beg of you to excuse my somewhat bold conclusion. I shall probably be punished as I was before, by finding that you are engaged for every waltz. Is it so?"

"Yes, that is the fact."

"And no hope of a quadrille, by way of compensation?"

"It would not be right for me to offer Mr. Engineer a compensation, when he has had no loss. Besides——"

"Besides?"

"I believe I am engaged for the quadrille as well."

"You believe?" repeated Williamson, and turned his eyes with such earnestness on Marie Louise that her cheeks flushed. As he turned away at the same moment, she would willingly have called him back again, but that was not to be done.

Later in the evening, when form and order began to be broken through, and the dancing room besides became intolerably warm, the ladies, led by their hostess, began to extend their promenade into the little inner room, and it was found so agreeable a change that presently every corner was filled with company. The little recess of the bow-window, which with all its leafy plants looked green as a flower-garden, won universal admiration. It was, in fact, very tastefully arranged, but had one fault, and this a very important one. As it was lighted only from the outer room, the dancing ladies did not venture into it, in the fear that the darkness might prevent the gentlemen from seeing and asking them to dance. Marie Louise had seen the inviting place from a distance, but she would not have had courage to enter it, had not one of the young girls beckoned to her to join her, that she might fasten a loosened braid of hair for her.

As our heroine now stood at the window, and looked over the street to her own dwelling, she perceived how plainly a form could be seen and observed behind the curtains. She could see her mother, how she bent and raised her head, and the heart of Marie Louise beat at the natural thought that Williamson had probably stood at the same spot to observe and watch her. Then came a feeling of tenderness over her proud spirit, and she reproached herself for having felt offended at his undesigned manner of greeting her; and afterwards, when he openly and sincerely appealed to her, having treated him with coldness, and, what was worse, with indifference and bitterness.

Leaning against the window, and plunged in the reflections which it had called forth, she did not perceive that her companion had vanished, whilst Williamson had softly approached. He was already close to her when she turned round; and, as if the change was nothing unexpected, she said, without embarrassment, and with so gentle and kind a voice, that Williamson's heart was raised high above all little vexations: "Now I know quite as well as Mr. Engineer, how we appear from here."

"As well as you now know how it appears *here!*" replied Williamson, in a low voice, as he laid his hand upon his heart.

Marie Louise turned her head away, without answering: a slight trembling moved her lips.

"After supper a cotillon will be danced," continued Williamson; "will Miss Marie Louise also refuse to dance that with me?"

"No, certainly not."

"Thanks—ah, a thousand thanks, dearest Marie Louise! But one more request, now that my lucky star is in the ascendant—it is so often overclouded! We have been proposing this evening a sledging party for the day after to-morrow; the snow will be hard enough, there is a moon, and every thing is favourable. If my highest and dearest wish is not fulfilled, however—that of driving Marie Louise in my sledge—they may arrange what they like, I shall not be of the party."

"Well," answered Marie Louise, in her usual playful manner, "as that would be a loss to the whole company, I must consider it my duty to do nothing that would interfere with their pleasure."

Before she could prevent him, he had taken her hand and pressed it to his lips, and Marie Louise felt the warmth of this kiss even longer than Williamson's brow had previously been clouded.

CHAPTER IX.

The momentary joy my heart now feels,
A foretaste of eternal bliss reveals.
UNONIUS.

. . . . Life plays but for a time
With a joyous world.
LENSTÖM.

It may be well imagined that the bay horse, as well as Carl, were duly equipped on the important day, so as to do honour to their master at the head of the town sledging party; since, as chief director of the affair, Williamson was to take the lead.

Yet, how did our hero express himself in his "Sketch?" "*What does man know of the result of all his calculations.*"

Poor Williamson! For many years afterwards nothing could vex him more than to be reminded of this sledging party—a true Tycho Brahe's day, from which all his subsequent misfortunes were dated.

On no January morning shone the sun brighter than on this. The cold had left roses in frost-work upon Williamson's window panes, but he thawed them with his lips, in order that he might look over to his opposite neighbour's. Alas! her windows were also covered with frost-roses, and not a single glance could steal in. At half-past ten, he thought he might with propriety pay a visit, so as to get a ray of sunshine from Marie Louise, before he drove to the inn, where the party was to assemble, and where he had some arrangements to make. With a warm heart and joyful countenance, he entered his neighbour's apartment, and Marie Louise seemed to receive him, if not with warmth, at least friendly and joyful. A half hour was passed, during which serious and playful words were passed from lip to lip. Williamson took his leave. At three o'clock he would be back, and at four o'clock, he was to fetch her.

They parted.

Marie Louise took out her dress, her shawl, and other little articles of dress, smoothed her hair before the glass, loosened her ringlets from their fetters, and then rolled them up again, so as to pack them under her cap, which was tried on again and again.

"You are taking plenty of time in dressing to-day, my child," said her mother, smiling.

Marie Louise looked affectionately into her mother's eyes, kissed her beloved hand, and answered confidingly:

"To-day is one of my good days. I am as happy as a child."

"God grant that it may last," added her mother; "may no caprice disturb your happiness."

"What caprice, dearest little mamma?"

"A caprice of fate, or of your own."

"Oh, I cannot be capricious to-day. One is not capricious when one is happy."

"And why, my Marie Louise, are you more than usually happy to-day?" asked her mother, as she held her daughter's hand tenderly between her own.

"I do not know myself, dearest mamma! But so free, and lighthearted, and joyful have I never felt before. Yesterday, at the beginning of the new year, I communed with myself very seriously, and thought to myself of what you, mamma, always wish to see improved, my fickleness, and why should I not own it—my proud spirit, which is so often wounded, whilst I am not careful enough not to wound others."

"Ah, Marie Louise, how glad I am to hear you speak thus! Has the beautiful sermon of our good pastor awakened these good purposes in you, my child?"

"No, mamma, I had formed them before," answered Marie Louise, and bowed her head, blushing, over her mother's shoulder. "Still they were strengthened at church, and I trust for ever."

Whilst mother and daughter were thus holding converse, Williamson was executing his commission at the inn, which stood some little distance from the town. When perfectly convinced that everything was done and arranged to secure the pleasure and convenience of the party, he, at two o'clock, seated himself again in his sledge, and was reckoning on his way home how much time was left for his toilette, when, not far from the town, he perceived an open sledge coming towards him. He drew up his horse at the same moment that the driver of the other carriage appeared to have received orders to do the same, and in another second was Williamson out of his sledge, and standing at the door of the other.

"Marie Louise!" exclaimed he, almost breathless from astonishment.

"My good Engineer Williamson," answered Marie Louise, with a tone of confidence that she had never before used, "do not be angry—it is not my fault, really it is not—yet I see that you are ready to condemn me unheard."

"God forbid that I should condemn any one unheard, least of all her by whom I wish to be favourably judged myself; yet, tell me, in Heaven's name, what is this all about?"

"Only an hour ago I received by this sledge a note from the Baroness Segerstad, who——"

"I cannot, I dare not, venture to say," interrupted Williamson, with beseeching looks, "what an extremely unpleasant impression it gives me, that a messenger, a note, let it come from whom it may, should chase away so quickly the remembrance of a promise previously made. But it is not too late to alter. Turn back again, I beg; so much for me depends on this kindness on your part?"

"It cannot be; and you could hardly wish that I should expose myself to ridicule, can you?"

"Yes," answered Williamson, coldly; for the temperature of his heart had suddenly fallen,—"but to expose me to ridicule, that is nothing. What will be thought of it when the originator of the party can find no lady to drive, and is obliged to stay at home?"

"That, indeed, would be laughable," owned Marie Louise, "for a man to sit at home to lament over a disappointed expectation! Let me not believe that!"

"No, believe it not," rejoined Williamson, at the same time angry and convinced; "I will seek out one of the superfluous young ladies. When shall you return, Marie Louise?"

"As soon as possible! And believe me, now—I say it in earnest—it grieves me much to go away to-day, when I had promised myself so much pleasure; but the baroness (Mr. Engineer knows what obligations I am under to her) writes and begs me, in the name of God, to go out to her, to help watch at the sick bed of her little daughter. Could I hesitate to share a sorrow with her who so often has made me a sharer in her joys?"

"No; if this is the case, you could not do otherwise. But tell me again—say it right heartily, that it grieves you to be obliged to go away."

"Mr. Engineer, the driver and the horses are getting impatient. I have said all I have to say."

"Then farewell, fare thee well, Marie Louise."

"Farewell," whispered she, blushing.

"Add one word more—a single word—and I will go."

"Farewell, William!"

"Now all is right; go, and God be with you!" said he, emphatically, and he gave the driver himself a sign to proceed.

Over the last look of Marie Louise, as the sledge flew on, lay a cloud that reflected its shade on William's heart; but he chased it away—for if his fate were not irrevocably decided, yet he had grounds for dreams of a blessedness which might yet be realized in the future which lay before him.

* * * * * *

Marie Louise was absent for more than a month; and as during this time Williamson had not the slightest inclination for gaiety, his arrears of work were more than made up again. He worked for the season of peace and joy that he fancied awaited him. His only relaxation, with the exception of the hours for meals, which he spent with his kind hosts, were the visits which he paid to Marie Louise's mother; and nothing afforded him greater pleasure than the little proofs she gave him of her good will and friendship. Her confidence in him increased each day. She no longer saw in him a stranger; he was to her a dear son; and without any feeling of reserve or embarrassment, she confided to him her little household cares, or asked of him the advice she needed. Through Williamson's means, who procured for her wood and other commodities from the country at low prices, she was able to lay in stores of what she had formerly been obliged to pay dearly for when bought at the door, or sent for into the town. And if by chance, in his walks through the market, Williamson found out anything particularly good, his opposite neighbour and his old hostess were sure to get it between them.

At last, on a gloomy February afternoon, the sledge from Segerstad drove up to the door of the poor widow. Williamson, at the sight, sprang from his chair with delight, and could with difficulty restrain his impatience as long as politeness demanded. Uneasily he counted the minutes until an hour had passed, and with it had disappeared the carriage of the baroness. At last he stood at the door of the apartment which contained the being dearest to him in the whole world.

As he entered, Marie Louise sat alone at the table, busied with the preparation of some work. At the very first glance, Williamson could perceive that a chill breath had passed over his beautiful flower garden; his blossoming hopes were withered. Marie Louise was, indeed, friendly; nay, more than that, she was kind, but stiff as a rose over which the frost has passed.

"At all times an attentive neighbour," said she, smiling, before Williamson could bring out a word; and the tone was so carefully measured, that he immediately understood the footing on which they were to stand towards one another.

"Something has occurred," thought Williamson. "What, I must learn. She has allowed the influence of another to work on her. But it would never do to play the suppliant lover:

then all were lost. Oh, women, how soon can they destroy our loveliest paradise!"

In spite of his cast down hopes, Williamson was of good courage. He thought he had but to do with a light cloud, which would at last give way to the sun.

"Yes, indeed, I pride myself on it; but this is no merit when one has two such interesting ladies as neighbours. Is the little young lady at Segerstad restored to health, that our town has recovered again its brightest star?"

Marie Louise was evidently startled at the careless manner in which Williamson greeted her and spoke. She whom he had hitherto addressed in so reserved a manner, and to whom, at their last parting, he had so plainly confided the secret of his heart, now to be spoken to by him as if to the commonest acquaintance.

"The little Ottavia got better in a couple of weeks; but Segerstad is so attractive."

"I understand. It is quite natural that Miss Marie Louise should take pleasure in society which suits her taste so well. I have always heard Segerstad spoken of as a temple dedicated to liberality and the Graces."

"It is true. The baroness is bewitching. An angel of goodness to all in distress, she is equally distinguished for her cultivation of mind, and her lively manners in society."

"She must be perfection itself. I only cannot understand how Miss Marie Louise is able to tear herself away from this Eden."

"My duties at home."

"Oh, after only a month, it is too soon to think about them."

The blood streamed into Marie Louise's cheeks. "I know not," said she, coldly, "whether I am not best judge when these duties should assert their claim."

"Without doubt!"

"And, therefore, remarks of this nature——"

"Are quite unbecoming?"

"And, nevertheless, Mr. Engineer has——"

"Has ventured to make such? Very true, and I should be ready on my knees to apologize for such boldness, had I not, as an attentive neighbour—you were pleased to bestow on me this title—observed how much it grieved my good friend, your mother, to be so long separated from her daughter. Former sorrows are often revived in solitude, and during the hours that Mistress N—— has permitted me to spend with her, it was her greatest, I may almost say, her only pleasure to count the days until the return of her daughter,—a return so often postponed."

"I know," said Marie Louise, with stifled emotion, "that Mr. Engineer has been very kind to mamma, and I am the first to wish to thank him for it. But it was quite with mamma's will and permission that I remained away."

"She is too good to wish any thing than what Miss Marie Louise herself wished—but I have perhaps detained you too long! Can I not see my good neighbour, your mother, this evening?"

"Mamma is busy with her chocolate. If it is agreeable to you, I will tell her that——"

"Ah, no, do not trouble yourself on my account. I will do myself the pleasure of calling another time!" and, with a bow, Williamson took his leave as quietly as if he were the neighbour in the under instead of the upper story.

"What means this change?" said Marie Louise to herself.

"The spirit of pride and convention has taken possession of her at the baronial Segerstad. I only wish it lay in New Holland!" said Williamson, as, much less calm than he seemed, he crossed the street to his own home.

"The Engineer Williamson has been here, mamma," said Marie Louise, with averted face, as her mother entered a short time afterwards.

"And why is he no longer here?" asked her mother, both vexed and surprised at the same time.

"Indeed—I do not know."

"You do not know?—very certain you *do* know; that one can hear in your tone. Have you already forgotten what I just now said, and what I wrote to you often, that Williamson has been more friendly, more tender to me than a son?"

"No, dear mamma, I have not forgotten."

"And yet he is gone already?"

"I said I would call you—but he must be busy."

"There is something more in all this, Marie Louise! I remarked directly I spoke to you of Williamson that your countenance changed, and I must say, my child, that I have long suspected that your constant visits to Segerstad have injured, I will not say the purity of your heart—since I trust that is too firmly rooted—but the purity of your mind. Every time that you come back from it, you are more full of pretension, pride, and caprice. A poor girl, even though she may be of good birth, is not on an equality with a rich baroness, however she may be treated by her as a sister. This kindness ought, on the contrary, to make you reflect on the difference there is in your rank, and render you more humble and thankful."

"I cannot be humble," answered Marie Louise, in a low voice; "but thankful I am, towards those who never let me feel that I am poor."

"Good God! my child," sighed Mistress N——, with the deep anguish of a true mother, who fears that her child is about to commit an error. "Alas! how different are the feelings that you express to-day from those which were awakened in your mind on New-Year's day, and from which I promised myself so much joy."

Marie Louise was silent.

"I know the Baroness of Segerstad and the fine company that is going out and in there very little," continued her mother—"but you shall go no more there."

"Mamma, I have promised to go back again in a fortnight."

"That you may have done; but I say a most earnest No—remember that; it is time to set limits to your self-sufficiency. Towards your own mother, I trust it is not to be displayed."

"No, mamma!" replied Marie Louise, whilst she reverently kissed her mother's hand. "But there is some one here on whose account I must go away. When he has left, I will return."

"Williamson?"

"Yes."

The mother shook her head in sorrow. "You wish to destroy all my hopes," said she. "He is young, handsome, good, and has a profitable profession—what more is wanted?"

"He is—I believe—I mean—they say, that he is intemperate, although I must say that this fault, which I have more than any other a horror of, has been carefully concealed here."

"Williamson intemperate!—are you in your senses?"

"I know it for certain, mamma. I have heard of it from good authority, that he lives sometimes in the very worst company, and in peasants' huts and in islands whole weeks over the time necessary for his business. And the person with whom on these occasions he has spent his time in such noble pleasures, and with whom he is very intimate, is a man of intemperate habits and bad reputation; the same who in the autumn paid Williamson a visit; whom we saw go in, and whom to conceal he drew down the blinds. I remember the circumstance quite well."

"Nonsense, Marie Louise! How can you believe such a tale? How can you give more credit to the stupid inventions than to your own sound judgment? It requires certainly no extraordinary reason to see that Williamson is as far from being an intemperate man as that your good sense has wandered out of the right path. Who could have told you all that?"

"It was related at Segerstad by the baron, as well as the baroness, and also by cousin Malcolm. The latter ought to know very well about it, since this person, the Brandy-Advocate Pellander, as he is called, has a lawsuit to conduct for him, and has talked about himself and the engineer having all kinds of adventures together for a whole week just before Williamson came into the town."

"As if that could not have happened accidentally."

"No, their acquaintanceship must be very intimate, since the engineer calls this nice person 'uncle.'"

"There may be also some reason for this; and all that can be said about this trifling affair is neither more nor less than that they have got up a story to lower Williamson in your eyes, and that you have shown yourself only too ready to receive the calumny as truth. But he shall justify himself."

"Not for the world. You would not surely say a word to him on the subject?"

"In this matter I shall act as it best pleases me."

CHAPTER X.

Canst thou more desire,
Than love alone can give?
GRAFSTRÖM.

WILLIAMSON let three days pass over before he renewed his visit.

This time he found Mistress N—— alone. He had purposely chosen a time when he knew that Marie Louise would be absent on a visit. Williamson congratulated his neighbour on the fulfilment at last of her desire. "How happy must you now be!" said he.

She answered frankly, "That I cannot exactly say. Marie Louise gives me much cause for uneasiness."

"How so?" asked Williamson, turning pale.

"That detestable Segerstad does her no good. The time was —but that is so long ago that I can scarce remember it—when I myself was a fine lady, a lady of property. Nothing do I desire less, though, than that Marie Louise should be the one, seeing that she cannot be the other. In Segerstad, however, I really believe she fancies to herself that she can lay claim to everything."

"The good sense of your daughter——"

"Alas! my good Engineer Williamson, people are blind when under the influence of self-love and vanity."

"You must not be too severe, my good friend."

"Alas!" said the excited mother, feeling a desire to confide in one who could understand her so well, "would to God I had not been too weak at first! I have always remarked that Marie Louise aspired too high, but I feared that too much preaching on this point would only make the matter worse, therefore I have been too sparing of it."

"But what do you refer to at present?"

"Ah," said she, blushing, for as Williamson had not yet declared himself, it was difficult for her to explain exactly what she meant—"ah, it is much!"

"A stranger," continued Williamson, with tenderness of manner, "cannot ask for full confidence, but my good friend knows that my sympathy is warm and sincere."

"That I believe, or rather I am certain of it."

"And when your daughter went away," added he, as he drew his chair nearer, "I had a hope, a slight hope, that I was not disagreeable to her." A respectful kiss on her hand left her to guess his meaning.

"I thought so myself, also; and from what I know of the character and actions of Engineer Williamson, it would be a little proof of good sense or delicacy, were I to pretend I did not understand his own feelings."

"How can I thank you enough for this confidence!" said Williamson, warmly. "That I can only attempt when the day comes that crowns my hopes! Yet I must say that when I was last here, Miss Marie Louise gave me plainly to understand how foolish was the hope that I had ventured to cherish."

"That I can well understand. But all is not lost. You could never imagine, Mr. Engineer, what foolish stories have been put together to interfere with the possible inclination of Marie Louise in a certain direction."

"How!—calumny! God be thanked, then all may be right again. For though I am not more perfect than other sons of Adam, yet I have upon my conscience the weight of no bad action at which I need blush."

"I felt convinced of that beforehand! It has been asserted of Mr. Engineer—forgive me if I am frank, though, considering the position in which we stand, and that in which we may stand in future, I am unwilling to run the risk of having to reproach myself for making matters worse—but it has been asserted that Mr. Engineer has not always lived in the best society, that he is a little inclined to intemperance in his habits, and has therefore got into rather unseemly affairs."

"That is rather too strong!" exclaimed Williamson, pale with anger. "Good God! I never imagined that such things could be said of me. Has any particular affair been mentioned?"

"No; but one of the intimate acquaintances of the engineer's, an advocate of the name of Pellander——"

"Oh, thank Heavens! comes the wind from that quarter," said Williamson, with a lightened heart; "then I can soon clear myself, which, under any circumstances, I hope I could have done. But it pains and grieves me deeply that she could have given credence to such a miserable tissue of truth and falsehood."

"Truth?"

"Yes, truth; you shall yourself judge this part of the history."

As quick as lightning Williamson flew over the street, and returned back with his "Sketch;" which he had copied and preserved, as he was accustomed to do with similar letters written home to his friends, in order that he might have an opportunity afterwards, in mature years, of laughing over the adventures of his youth.

"There, my good friend, read this from beginning to end, and my acquaintance with Pellander will, I trust, be fully explained. I must, however, beg you to be so good as to remember that this was written three months ago to a confidential friend. It would therefore, perhaps, be better that your daughter should not read it, as she might find the tone of it rather too free; but in the hands of her experienced mother I venture to place this little epistle without any fear of misapprehension."

After saying this, Williamson took leave, and awaited at home the effect which might be produced by the sketch of "Uncle Pellander" and the last flask of rum.

If our hero had possessed any other means of justifying himself, he would not have adopted this one, since it might not, perhaps, prove the most successful. But be it as it may, he had obeyed the suggestion which the vexation of the moment inspired; the result might be favourable or not.

The mother of Marie Louise had such a sufficient conviction of the innate worth of Williamson as to require no proof. Nevertheless, she seized the paper with the greatest feeling of curiosity. During the reading of it a smile often passed over her lips, and she had gone through the little torn off postscript for the second or third time, when Marie Louise returned from her visit, and asked, in astonishment: "Now, what can mamma have got to read so interesting?"

"Well, then, my love, I have been forbidden to let you see it; but I must, in secresy, break through this prohibition. It is a letter which Williamson wrote three months ago to a friend at home."

"Good heavens! How can it have fallen into mamma's hands?"

"In the simplest manner. Williamson was here, and we have had a mutual explanation in the most delicate way, and the burthen of the song is, that he has looked out this letter from his papers."

Marie Louise looked dissatisfied. "I ought to have nothing to say against what mamma thinks it proper to do," said she.

"No, not well, since you must remember, my child, that your mother knew and understood all that concerns propriety long before she had a daughter who fancies she understands it better."

"Ah, now, mamma, you are too severe," sighed Marie Louise, as she took the letter from her mother's hand; "now you are not kind to me."

"Yes, indeed I am, my Marie Louise, even when I am now and then obliged to be severe. But read that, and then beg Williamson's pardon."

"I will read the letter when you are asleep to-night, mamma; I should like to be alone when I read it."

"Do as you please; you will not any how have long to wait, for already I feel sleepy and tired."

In the mysterious stillness of the night the heart speaks clearer than when the confusing and disturbing forms of daylight are coming and going about us, which if they do not quite silence it, at least they so mingle their strange voices with its tones, that its true language is not heard. Marie Louise sits now alone, and by the light of a little lamp she reads Williamson's letter. Her eyes sparkle, her cheeks flush, her lips smile. She folds the letter up, unfolds it, and reads it again.

Marie Louise knows how to discriminate. She does not mistake the tone of the letter; she recognises the frank, honest, right-minded man, as well as the lively comrade, full of youthful jokes and excusable levity. She laughed over the scenes with "Uncle" Pellander and his disasters; and at last, even over Williamson's perplexity in having to receive a visit from him when he was the last person whom he wished to see.

But as she proceeded still further, and read Williamson's open confessions about the "wild wood-pigeon," as she saw into his heart, and found there everywhere her own image, then it became also with her "too warm." Tears burst from her eyes, and she inwardly implored pardon for her unjust and unjustifiable want of confidence. Who could so love her or understand her as himself? With delight she lingered over the words—"She is none of your drooping lilies, who are always wanting a support, for she can support herself, that I assure you."

These words decided the victory for Williamson. Marie Louise was flattered, touched, appeased. From this moment there intervened a little period which was highly favourable to his hopes. But Williamson was sensitive and delicate-minded; deeply he felt the wound which the suspicions of Marie Louise had inflicted; and besides this, he loved too deeply and nobly to avail himself of this temporary change in his favour in order to bind himself for life. It cost him much, it is true, to defer the important hour; but the woman to whom he should devote his whole soul should first learn to know him better; she should have time to judge whether the influence of others was greater than his—greater than that of her own heart. He ventured to add the latter, for he could never forget the tone of her voice as she called him by his name at parting.

The winter, meanwhile, drew to an end, and the time approached when Williamson's business called him into the country again.

Often, almost daily, in this interval, did he visit his opposite neighbours, and laid open his heart so completely, that at times it seemed to Marie Louise as if he had spoken the important words, and that she had already answered, "I will be thine!" This was the time of her happiness, for then did Marie Louise follow the appealing voice of her own heart, that yet possessed power enough to stifle all other voices.

As Williamson took leave, he felt almost certain that had he at that moment asked her to be his, she would have consented. He was determined, however, that his proposal should be taken into consideration when free from the emotion of leave-taking, and when it could be viewed in calmness and solitude. And Marie Louise thanked him inwardly for this delicacy of feeling, which forwarded, rather than injured, his interests.

Now was he gone, and Marie Louise had undisturbed time to reflect on the decision that she would shortly have to make.

Williamson's pecuniary circumstances were not known to her from himself, but from the Utters her mother learnt that he had inherited only a very moderate fortune, the greater part of which had been spent in qualifying himself for his profession. Thus, for the present, his position in life, although good, could not be considered brilliant. He had but lately become a government land-surveyor. At the same time, through his uninterrupted activity and honourable conduct, he had won himself an excellent reputation, and much business had been confided to him. There was no doubt but that in the future he would become a wealthy man.

"Yes, in the future," thought Marie Louise. "That is a long way off—and, meanwhile——," it was after another visit to Segerstad that Marie Louise so thought. At the beginning of May she received a letter, the handwriting of which was familiar to her. With a trembling hand she broke the seal. The letter ran thus:—

"I know that Marie Louise will not be astonished at my boldness, in writing direct to her; for long, very long, has she known what this letter contains.

"Yet, ere I proceed, will she allow me, as the woman whose favour I seek, to speak in the tones with which I address her in my own heart?

"Marie Louise! If it were not sweeter than all else to say to you, I love you above all things! I would be silent, for this is nothing new to you, and you will understand all that is contained in the question which I put before you. Marie Louise, have you well considered? Can the humble land-surveyor, who has nothing to offer you but a warm heart and a moderate income, can he hope that you will deem this lot rich enough to share with him?

"I must restrain myself, not to break forth in the language of passion. I am feverish with restlessness, hope, and fear; I suffer beforehand all the martyrdom of a *no,* and I enjoy the blessedness of Heaven when my imagination dreams of a *yes.* So is my mind tossed to and fro, that you would perhaps both weep and laugh, could you enter it and see the disturbance that reigns there. Wholly occupied is it with the form of my idol, but according as my hopes rise or fall in the scale is the clothing of this form changed. A thousand times a day is it now draped with a rose-coloured veil of joy, now with mourning crape.

"What an unlimited power has this feeling which we call love over the soul! What a strange condition of mind it occasions! Must it not resemble madness? Yet I should not speak thus—thus rave. I will be rational—be worthy of Marie Louise. Oh, God! grant that my sighs may be heard; grant that she for whom it would be so sweet to live and work, and a glance from whose eyes can so multiply my powers, grant that she may have sufficient confidence to contentedly love me, and with joy become mine!

"In three days—this is the longest term that my heart and my reason can endure—I come myself to receive the answer that is everything to me.

"WILLIAM."

Marie Louise let the letter fall on her lap. What at this moment passed through her soul we know not, but that it was much and manifold one could judge by the changing colour of her cheeks, and by the clouds and flashes which alternately passed over her eyes.

CHAPTER XI.

Alas, there standest thou, as once did I,
With desolation in thy heart,
Alone with memories of pain.

"Now, welcome, ten thousand times welcome, my dear little engineer!" said Mistress Utter, whilst with motherly tenderness she embraced her lodger, now become so dear to her. He also pressed the old lady in his arms, with a warmth that betrayed the excitement of his feelings.

"Enough, enough, you are squeezing me to death!" said she, as, with a good-humoured smile, she withdrew from his rather too forcible exhibition of affection. "But just see how tanned and sun-burnt our engineer has become! You must have gone through much fatigue, I can well imagine, wandering about in dust and heat."

"Yes, indeed, mine is not always a pleasant occupation, dearest Aunt Gretchen. Yet let us have some coffee with all speed, for I must dress myself and go into the town."

"In the town? yes; I suspect you will not go very far. But be good enough to allow yourself time to rest, as becomes all prudent people."

"No, by heavens, no! I am not prudent, that I know. I must be off!" cried Williamson, whom she in vain tried to keep on the sofa. And away from his hostess and her coffee sprang the impatient lover.

As he reached his own room, he met Carl with a note in his hand. With a foreboding fear, Williamson tore it from him, broke the seal, and saw the words—"Not to-day—I cannot possibly! To-morrow morning I shall be at home.—M. L."

Williamson went into his bed-chamber, and locked the door after him. His blood, heated by his journey, and by the severe fatigue he had gone through in order to be able to pay a visit of two days to the town, which was all he could allow himself, received through this despatch such an increase of feverish excitement, that it throbbed in his veins, till he felt almost delirious. In vain his well-meaning hostess knocked at the door, his non-appearance and movements awakening her attention; but she received only the answer, "Aunt Gretchen, I have altered my mind. I am not going out. I feel so exhausted with travelling all night in the rain, after several days of very hard labour, that I think it will be better for me to lie down. I know my good little aunt will excuse me." Williamson had a positive horror of seeing or hearing any one, whoever they might be—even the tone of a human voice—ere his fate was decided. And perhaps the wisest thing that he could do, was to spend the interval in a condition between sleeping and waking.

The next morning at nine o'clock he stood, with feelings somewhat more calm, at his window, and looked over to that of his neighbours. He perceived a glimpse of Marie Louise, and, already for a long time dressed and in order ready for his visit, he took his hat, flew down stairs, and stood the next moment before her in whose hands lay his destiny.

Evidently agitated—she had not expected him so soon—she took her seat at one end of the sofa, and with a motion of her hand offered him the other.

Williamson, however, did not sit so far away, but close to her, and whilst he seized her hand and pressed it tenderly between his own, he said, in quick and broken words,—

"No more delay! Believe me, I am sufficiently tortured. Speak—speak quickly! May I hope that Marie Louise will not reject me?"

Marie Louise trembled so violently, that for a moment she was wholly incapable of speaking, and in her eyes and whole appearance lay something that revealed so plainly what was going on in her heart, that Williamson's boldness was at least pardonable, as, yielding to the rapture of hope, he threw his arm around her to press her to his breast, and spare her the acknowledgment.

But it was this movement which called forth all the terror of Marie Louise at the immense importance of the moment. This moment which, once past, could never, by tears, nor through repentance, be recalled, was too great to be so quickly spent—a whole life was to pay for it! She feared, she trembled—she had not enough considered. Almost with harshness she repelled his embrace.

"Marie Louise!" were the only words that he spoke; but his looks conveyed a reproach which she could scarcely stand. She cast down her eyes, and leaned her head upon her hand.

A few seconds passed in painful silence.

"I have not yet had time enough," stammered out Marie Louise at last, overwhelmed by the conflict of her feelings.

"How much time is then necessary?" asked Williamson, as he struggled to appear calm. "I can only remain two days, and I ventured to dream that they would have been passed more happily."

"Give me—give me time—till to-morrow evening."

"Till the last moment of my stay? Ah, Marie Louise, that is not right!—yet, I submit. Let me at least, then, meet with no evasion."

"No, no! To-morrow I shall have decided."

* * * * * *

Good old Mistress Utter stood on the watch, and waited for the moment when her little engineer would be back. She understood perfectly well where he had gone; and now that she saw Williamson return so soon, with so gloomy a countenance, she was not only vexed, but in the highest degree angry with the "ladies in the bow-windowed room, who, instead of giving themselves airs, ought to be grateful for the honour the engineer did them."

"Come in, William, come!" said the old lady, and opened her own door, as the engineer hoped to be able to slip up the stairs unobserved.

"No, my good aunt, I think it will be best for me to be alone. I am a little bewildered to-day."

"Yes, that I can well see; and therefore you must forgive your old friend if she is a little troublesome. But you may well believe that I am not very joyful to-day. What! has she given you a basket?" And as she said this, she had contrived to shut the door between Williamson and listeners.

"Not exactly; but she has not considered enough. To-morrow evening, my good aunt," and he nodded cheerfully to the old lady.

"Aha! I know where the shoe pinches; she has not yet received an answer from the Baroness Segerstad. Without her advice, Marie Louise does nothing."

"Is, then, my happiness to depend upon her decision?" said Williamson, with flashing eyes.

"So it is. And since my old man has already gone to the council room—for he could not wait breakfast for you—let us sit here on the sofa, and have a few reasonable words together. Look you, my good engineer, I understand these matters, and I must tell you that this fine lady the baroness, who has always advocated the cause of the yearly suitor from Malcolm's-Ness, has never been favourable to you. Therefore, I am of the opinion that the best you can do is to give the matter up."

"Impossible! I have the more foundation for believing that, in this case, this lady's omnipotence will effect nothing, since it has failed in the other. Marie Louise does not allow herself to be led, even when she has sought and listened to advice."

"Indeed she does, and even against her own inclination, provided her pride is brought into play."

"Her pride!"

"Well, well! do not get red! I believe, and the whole town thinks so likewise, that she could not make a better match than the one you offer her. But, as I have said before, she has high blood in her. I am curious to see how it will end; the spirit of pride is a powerful tempter. We shall see! we shall see!"

"Yes, we shall see," said Williamson, as he arose; and cross-the room, laid his hand upon the handle of the door.

"But one word more—and you must give me your hand on it," continued the old lady, as she stopped him at the door. "If you do not want to lose your chance through your own fault, then do not shut yourself up in this way in your own room, as if you were a criminal waiting for judgment; that will do no good with the girl. On the contrary, you must go out into the town and pass by her window, and eat and drink like other people, and walk as upright as if you had swallowed a poker, and pay visits, and gossip, and give answers, and behave in all respects as if you had no intention to hang yourself to-morrow morning, in case you get a basket."

"I thank you for the advice," rejoined Williamson, with a smile. "I will follow it, although I am so full of thought and care."

And Williamson fulfilled the wise prescription of Aunt Gretchen, by which the time, though long, was not so heavy on his hands, as in complete solitude. On the last half day, however, he could not but remain alone; and pacing up and down, his eyes constantly fixed on the clock, he counted the minutes until the hour-hand pointed to six.

"Now it must be evening," cried he, greatly excited. "Now must all be decided."

* * * * * *

The mother of Marie Louise would not make her appearance until the weather was settled, and had withdrawn to the inner room, where she remained, as restless as Mistress Utter, behind the curtains, to await the issue of the last interview, respecting which her daughter had only said the words, "I must follow no advice but my own."

With composure, Marie Louise received her lover this day; and as she immediately observed that he was not able to open the conversation, she had courage enough to do it herself.

"My good Engineer Williamson, I —— "

"Oh, nothing more is needful," said Williamson, interrupting her; and his cheeks became as white as the dress of Marie Louise. "I can guess the conclusion of the discourse."

"Do not misunderstand me," stammered she, whilst she blushed perhaps as much before herself as before him.

"No; I cannot mistake motives which lie revealed so plainly: it is only to be regretted that for awhile they lay concealed under honey-bearing flowers. Ah, Marie Louise! I loved, I idolized you, and I do it, perhaps, still; but know that a man can conquer his passion, when he finds the object of his deep devotion no longer worthy of his esteem."

"What is meant by this?" asked Marie Louise proudly, yet not without confusion.

"It means that a young woman who lays the holiest feelings of her heart in the scale of calculation, and who, in this struggle, disdains simple domestic happiness to await in the future more flattering prospects, can awaken no feeling of regret at her loss."

"Truly, Mr. Engineer over estimates here the weight of his influence; and it is not, perhaps, a little vain to assert, that such feelings, and such a struggle, have never existed. I, at least," added she, with trembling lips, "know not how he can justify such an assumption."

"Because, young lady, every one, in such a case, has a right to speak openly to the woman, who, after having accepted and encouraged his attentions, and twice begged for time to consider his suit, which a woman does not do when she has decided on a refusal, thus proves that she has been pleased to trifle with his feelings and his honour."

Marie Louise, who, to tell the truth, had prepared herself for entreaties and despair, appeared divided between the irritation she felt at this bold speech and her sympathy with his manly words; nevertheless, neither the one nor the other should influence the decision that she had irrevocably made.

The lot that Williamson had offered her seemed to her proud spirit meaner than it really was. The wife of a government land surveyor, who must come into contact with all kinds of people, assistants, and God knows what, must become vulgar, and perhaps has to expect, afterwards, reduced circumstances, poverty, a cottage in the country, want, the cries of children, diminished affection,——no; that was not the lot that she sought! She loved Williamson, but not deeply, not purely enough to wish to share with him a precarious fate. She had, also, the example of her mother before her eyes. What had she not become through a marriage without fortune? No, no! Poverty is hard to bear alone—unbearable as a wife, the mistress of a family, and mother!

"I think," said Marie Louise, breaking the silence which had followed Williamson's last words, "that it is beneath my dignity to answer these accusations. Perhaps the best thing that we can do, would be to say farewell to each other."

Williamson bowed, without giving an answer, and found himself outside the door; he knew not how. But after he had stood for a few moments leaning himself against the banisters, he discovered that he was without his hat, and he went in again to fetch it.

But what a sight was there! Marie Louise lay dissolved in tears, wringing her hands.

Williamson darted forward. "Oh, God! Oh, God!—you see, Marie Louise, you see!"

"What?" said she, restraining, with a powerful effort, the tempest of her sorrow.

"That your heart will also break."

"Not from love," rejoined she. "Believe it not, William; I am not so weak. But it is a bitter thought to have lost the esteem of one who was so dear to me."

"Then let all be changed, Marie Louise; chase away this bad, this false feeling which stands between thee and me. Believe me, love is higher, sweeter, holier than wealth and all that it can bring: let not the purity of thy soul be sullied any longer by a stain which is unworthy of thee and of pure womanhood."

"Do not speak so, William; it is in vain. What I have resolved stands unchanged—Farewell."

"Then, indeed, farewell, Marie Louise; fare thee well for ever."

"It is all over," said Williamson, with unnatural calmness, to his motherly friend; and opening the window which looked on the yard, he called out, "Carl, prepare the chaise."

"Not this evening, William," entreated the old woman anxiously.

"Yes, this very night; I must be out in the fresh air, and away to my business."

"Ay, you must, any how, think of that."

"I must think of it. I have an appointment for early the day after to-morrow; and it shall not be said that I have made a fool of myself about a woman. If I should now and then talk a little confused, or hear amiss, yet I will still attend to my business; work shall be my only physician."

"That is said so that I could shed tears of joy over you. But how long will it be until we see you again?"

"Probably not till the autumn—but then I hope to be sound again in mind and heart."

Marie Louise saw the chaise drive up, and Williamson immediately afterwards come out of the house in travelling costume. The counsellor and his wife stood on the steps.

Marie Louise's mother, who sat at the window of her inner room, with tearful eyes, nodded a farewell. Williamson took off his hat respectfully and returned her expressive greeting by a low bow.

Then all disappeared. The chaise rolled away. The mother opened softly the door into the outer room. Marie Louise lay mute, and with fixed eyes, like a marble statue, on the sofa.

END OF PART THE FIRST.

Part the Second.

CHAPTER XII.

So the story goes . . . .
Read what follows here.
DAHLGREN.

"As I tell you—on my honour, just as I tell you, brother Will'son. Stop a bit: it was Friday evening that a courier came and drove up into my court. I lay in a pleasant dose, and was at that moment thinking how I could best get through the heap of suits that I have to conduct at the next sessions, when, all at once, some one began to knock and make a disturbance at the door, making as great a riot as if they had brought all the trumpets of the day of judgment with them. 'Olle, Peter, Lasse!' cried I, now wide awake—for I do not like every body in the house to be in bed at the same time, as one might be robbed and murdered without knowing anything about it—'Olle and Lasse,' I cried, 'do you hear yon dogs?'"

"Go on, go on!" said Williamson, as, about three months after the period when we last left him, he sat at his writing table in a decent little chamber in a peasant's cottage.

"Go on, yes, but you must not be in too great a hurry, brother; quietness in all things, that is my motto. Meanwhile came Lasse at my call, and exclaimed: 'Good Lord! who would have thought this! The squire of Malcolm's-Ness has been upset in returning home from the market at Lo, and is at the point of death—and before he goes, he wants to speak with master a bit.' 'Very good, very good!' said I, rubbing my hands, as I always do when I see a good job before me. I never grudge having to go out at nights, and therefore was not long before I stood before the shining face of my great patron. But how pale was he now, poor man! He had been upset, was crushed to pieces, and must die; so he wanted beforehand to make his will, for which business, as brother Will'son well knows, he could find no more suitable lawyer than your humble servant, who has settled and arranged more than one in his time."

"And the will of the dying man?"

"Was this; that setting aside the legal entail, his whole property, that is, the beautiful estate of Malcolm's-Ness, and all and everything, should go to his beloved relative, Miss Marie Louise N——."

Williamson sprang from his chair, and took two or three turns up and down the room with his hand pressed to his brow. "Now," thought he to himself, with a bitter sigh, "now is the last hope, the last possible chance destroyed. Oh, Marie Louise!"

"Does the young lady already know of her good fortune?" said he, as he turned to Pellander, who, half intoxicated and half asleep, sat on the bed.

"Yes, indeed, the last possessor of Malcolm's-Ness, as we may now call him, made it over to her with his own hands."

"The young lady was present?"

"Of course! They had sent for her from Segerstad, and she came in company with the baron and baroness."

"And how did the event seem to affect her?"

"Remarkably well! She had, it is true, a few tears at hand for the death of her cousin, and played a right sorrowful part in the death-bed scene; but on the whole, it was just as if she had always had it all before. She behaved herself like a countess, and greeted me as if I were a sort of valet, and not the person through whose hands she becomes what she now is,—the silly thing!"

"Excuse me, Pellander—I am not quite well!" said Williamson, and taking his hat, went out for a walk in the wood. He felt that at this moment he must be alone.

When he returned home late in the evening, Pellander had fallen asleep, and this time he slept so profoundly, that Williamson had him carried out of the room; after which he lighted his lamp and sat down to his writing, determined to extinguish, in a flood of business, the burning thoughts that seemed to set his blood in flames.

* * * * * *

Into every corner of the district penetrated black-bordered notes, announcing that Squire Malcolm M——, of Malcolm's-Ness, had departed this life. A stately funeral kept up his remembrance for three weeks; in the fourth, nothing was spoken of but the rich and distinguished heiress who had taken for the winter the suite of apartments on the first floor of the house of Merchant P——, in the Market-place. Not before the spring would she take possession of Malcolm's-Ness.

Meanwhile, Mistress N——, who saw more with fear than joy this change in the fortunes of her daughter, continued to live in her little bow-windowed room. She wished to remain there until the new apartments were ready for their occupation. Marie Louise was almost always at Segerstad, where we will also pay a fugitive visit.

It is a cool autumn evening, of that character which awakens melancholy thoughts. In the saloon at Segerstad, through whose broad antique window, the moon threw a broken light upon the dark oak floor, sat Marie Louise. She was reclining negligently in an easy chair, with one foot resting on a soft and swelling foot-stool, her eyes fixed thoughtfully on the patch of moonlight on the floor, which, in her fantasy, was widened into a stream, on whose surface strange figures hovered.

Now was seen surrounded with gleaming wax tapers, the silver-mounted bier of Squire Malcolm M——, in all its pomp; now rose up a young and agile form. It was the man, at whose name alone her heart so beat that its pulsations could be heard,—and he looked at her with a glance in which sorrow and contempt were mingled. At last appeared her own form, but not plainly, and it showed itself only on the borders of the silver flood, then sunk and rose again, without emerging from the stream, till the shadowy form faded away and disappeared as the door opened and a servant entered with the lights. With light came cheerfulness again. A beautiful child, the little Ottavia, came dancing in, and called Marie Louise by her name. Behind the lovely sylph came a young and handsome woman in the full bloom of womanhood; it was the Baroness Charlotte, the early protectress of Marie Louise.

"What are you about here, so lonely, Marie Louise?" said she, with a slight reproach in her tone, "I do believe you are indulging in day dreams again."

"No, I have done with day dreaming; I was only thinking of some of my old dreams," answered Marie Louise, as she seated herself near the baroness, at a little work-table which stood in the wide recess of the window.

Ottavia played at her mother's feet, and the baroness performed the part of a mother most becomingly, though a close observer would have remarked that her love was shown more in pretty, tender caresses than in a comprehension of the high duties of a mother.

"Little Ottavia must go now with her doll, and play out there on the rug; here, near the window, there is a draught, which is not good for Ottavia, who has just been ill;" and with a caress the little one was got rid of.

"Now, dear Marie Louise! Now we are quite alone; children ought never to overhear, when ladies talk over certain matters. Tell me now," and here a significant smile played round the lips of the Baroness Charlotte, "whether you have left off mourning over your ideal surveyor? Do you not perceive that Heaven itself has interfered in the matter? Just think, if this match had been irrevocably decided on before this brilliant change in your circumstances took place?"

"It was a punishment from Heaven, rather than a good interposition, that it should happen so perversely," said Marie Louise.

"Perversely!—what a singular expression! In my opinion, the affair has gone quite right all through."

"Ah, no! If Williamson had but made his proposal three months later, or cousin Malcolm his will three months sooner, all would have been very different."

"Oh, if all that you want is an alteration in the reckoning of time, you could doubtless find a very willing assistant—nothing is easier."

"Nothing more difficult in the position in which we now stand! Williamson will never seek me again."

"I should consider that a very fortunate circumstance. Besides, it is not more than his duty—for the heiress of the Malcolm's-Ness is fruit that hangs too high for him."

"Do not speak so, Charlotte! I can never forget that he considered the poor young girl of the bow-windowed room as a most desirable match."

"For him it certainly was, and the best of it was, that the poor young girl disdained him."

"But the rich one,—I must own, to you, would not do so, if he thought her worthy that he should forget the past."

"That is indeed laughable," said the baroness, with an impatient motion of her beautiful head; "you had better anticipate this state of the case, and go and woo him again yourself."

Marie Louise blushed to the brow. "I woo him myself?" said she, hurt and half-offended. "I may confide to you my most inmost thoughts respecting a matter which is quite out of the question, but you must not therefore believe that for a single second I should forget my own dignity and the modesty of my sex."

"Now I recognise again my noble, proud, own Marie Louise. You really frightened me a little! Your character has so many strange whims in it—but I am not satisfied that you should have taken a dwelling in the town. You had much better have spent the winter with your mother out here in Segerstad, as you will not go till spring to Malcolm's-Ness."

"No; I am vain enough to wish to make my old envious friends still more envious. Besides this, I like the society of the little town much."

"I live only six miles from this town," said the baroness, with emphasis, "and go there not more than three times in the year."

"Therefore you do not get to know the people. Now, however, I hope that you will find accommodation in our house, and the society there——"

"Ah, I know it," interrupted the baroness, "yet we are thinking of going to Stockholm. What do you say to following us?"

"A hearty 'No.' I feel no inclination for it; at least not at present."

"Your inclination has a more unassuming object," observed the baroness, ironically, and called the little Ottavia to her, in order to put an end to the conversation.

* * * * * *

In her spacious apartments in the Market-place, Marie Louise, at the beginning of October, entered on a brilliant mode of life on a small scale. Her mother, who now, as formerly, was delicate in health, and more than ever anxious and sorrowful, did not like constant company, and often retired early. But Marie Louise could do the honours for both, and received many people, both out of the town and from the country. The only persons who had not accepted her invitations with gratitude were the old Utters. They had not even returned the visit which she had paid them on her return to the town.

The autumn passed, and the winter was half over. It was the beginning of January, when Carl stopped one day with the engineer's empty chaise before the counsellor's house. "In Heaven's name, what is the matter?" cried Mrs. Utter, as she tore a letter out of his hand. It was not Williamson's hand; not even his signature. As the counsellor was not at home, the old lady opened and read the letter, which was addressed to her husband. It ran thus:

"A very intimate friend and old acquaintance of the Engineer Williamson begs to announce to the worthy Counsellor Utter, that the aforesaid Engineer Williamson is at the point of death, having lain for the last six weeks at the Radeboda Farm, in the Hörnö Mountains, ill of a fever, which he at first thought unimportant, but which will now very probably put an end to his good and active career in life. As I yesterday came into the neighbourhood respecting the division of an estate, and found the above mentioned good friend unable to take care of himself, I consider it my duty to beg his worthy host to endeavour to send a doctor to him; for which purpose I send his servant with his chaise. Williamson's two assistants, who come here from time to time, have both assured me that it has been only the determined objection of aforesaid which has prevented medical assistance being called in sooner.

"In the name of humanity,

"JOSIAS PELLANDER, Attorney."

"Badeboda, Jan. 4, 18—."

"Nina! Britta! Lisa! my dear children, run as fast as your legs can carry you: one to the club and one to the burgomaster's, to find the counsellor, and tell him that an affair of great importance requires him at home."

As soon as the old lady had issued these commands, she poured out for Carl a glass of spirits, and begged him, in Heaven's name, to tell her how it had all come about.

"Now, then, it came about in this way," began Carl. "In autumn we had some business in Linemark, and the engineer, for three days, was cold and wet, up to his knees in mud. Then we took up our winter quarters at Anches Manson's, in Radeboda, so that, as the engineer said, we should not be interrupted in our work by any visits to the town before Christmas. But see you, he was rather out in his reckoning; for instead of working, there he lay, first with an attack on the chest, and then he got worse and worse, until it came to what it is now."

"And is it really so bad, Carl, as it says in the letter?"

"Yes, indeed, though I don't well know what he has said; but Pellander knows how to set it down. But any how, may I take the liberty to observe, that between this and Radeboda is a horrible long bit of road, and I have not had the heart to stop more than once on the way to get something to eat."

The old lady hastened to comply with this hint from Carl, and whilst he busied himself to do honour to the remains of the dinner the conversation was continued.

"But would he neither send for us nor for the doctor?"

"No, he would not hear of it; for our young gentlemen—we have two of them now—often wanted to persuade him. He always answered, that it was all nothing, and would do very well without a doctor's help."

Mistress Utter looked through the window to see whether the counsellor was not coming. "Yes, surely; there he comes with his coat flying. Now we shall consult together and adopt some plan." Two hours after the arrival of Pellander's letter, the doctor and Carl set off; the latter laden with a host of prescriptions and every thing suitable for an invalid that "Aunt Gretchen" could collect together in haste.

"My dearest, best doctor," were the last words of the old man, as the doctor, before starting, took a parting glass with him, "in God's name make him well again, and persuade him to come to us as soon as possible. Ah, if I could only go with you and nurse him! Tell him, too, that my old wife, whether walking or standing still, will be shedding tears about him."

CHAPTER XIII.

Grief and sorrow ne'er depart—
They only flit from heart to heart.
DAHLGREN.

In her beautiful boudoir, Marie Louise was pacing up and down; now standing before the fire-place, where a bright fire blazed, now at the window, from whence she looked up to the sky, now dark with clouds. All that surrounded her bore the stamp of peace and happiness; but the young heiress sighed, nevertheless, for she had already experienced that though riches can provide for many wants, those of the heart remain unsatisfied.

"Lieutenant von Walden begs to know whether the ladies will receive him this evening?" said the femme-de-chambre, entering.

"Yes—no—I do not know; mamma has the headache, and I have—God knows what, but well I am not. Be so good, Ma'mselle Henriette, to say that mamma is not well, and I am keeping her company."

Ma'mselle Henriette retired, but came back shortly, with a disturbed countenance, which awakened the attention of Marie Louise.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"They say——" Ma'mselle Henriette, who knew pretty well how matters stood with her young mistress, hesitated to say more.

"What, in Heaven's name, is the matter?"

"The doctor has been sent for in haste to a sick person."

"Where?"

"In the country; I do not exactly know where, but they fear that he will arrive too late; the person to whom he is called may perhaps already——"

"It is not the Baroness of Segerstad?"

"Oh, no! it is some one quite different; a person who will be greatly missed in the town here—the Engineer Williamson."

"Williamson!" cried Marie Louise, in such a piercing and heart-struck tone of alarm, that Ma'mselle Henriette started back in affright. "Oh God! oh God! thou art just!" and Marie Louise sank down on the sofa. The distress of her cry brought her mother in. Marie Louise stretched out her arms towards her, and for the first time for many years she wept on her mother's bosom.

"Say nothing! say nothing! have mercy on me!" she faltered out. "I know too well all that mamma would say!"

"No, my child; it would be cruel now to reproach you. The hardest for you is the thought that on this occasion, as his wife, or even as his betrothed, you would have had the right to visit him and nurse him."

"I will go, mamma—I will, I must go to him! He shall not die without my seeing him, without his forgiving me!"

"Impossible! Your reputation?"

"What matters to me my reputation? I care for nothing but him! Have I not suffered enough? Let me go! Old Mistress Utter will accompany me, and——"

"You speak madness, my child. Even should he die, you must remain at home. You have no pretext to justify such a step, and the whole of your life hereafter you might have to repent of having yielded to the impetuosity of your feelings."

"Mamma," said Marie Louise, with a trembling voice, "such a step would convince William that——"

"That you are as changeable as you are capricious. Enough, Marie Louise. It is my duty to watch over you, when you yourself forget that a woman can never transgress the bounds of propriety unpunished."

"Then let me, at least, go over to the Utters."

"Not even that. It would only give rise to tales to your discredit. Ma'mselle Henriette can go and make inquiries about the matter, that perhaps has been greatly exaggerated."

In a fever of anxiety, Marie Louise awaited the return of Ma'mselle Henriette.

Mistress Utter was, either from sorrow or from some other cause, not very communicative, and said it would be best for the ladies to read the letter themselves, which would explain everything; and she gave Ma'mselle the letter. Marie Louise took the letter to the light, and as she saw at the bottom the name of Pellander, the thought struck her how persons whom, at one time, we look on with contempt, or consider unworthy our attention, may often become important, and even dear to us, at others. Without the interference of the advocate, the doctor would not have been sent for; and were William saved, whom must she thank for it, next to God? "God bless him! I will never despise any one again," said she, as her hot tears fell on the strange signature "in the name of humanity."

Overwhelmed and stunned by sorrow, Marie Louise remained for a couple of days in a state of passive dejection, in which she seemed incapable of expressing her feelings by words. Sighs alone passed her lips.

In the meanwhile, Pellander's kind-hearted intervention was crowned with happy success, the illness having become serious more through neglect than through its original nature. In a couple of weeks more the patient was so far recovered that he was able to be moved, with all his effects, into the town; which took place at the beginning of February.

"Good God! how sadly you look!" exclaimed Mistress Utter, as she darted here and there about the engineer's little room.

"Nonsense! I shall soon be well under aunt Gretchen's good prescriptions," was Williamson's consolatory answer. "A young and strong fellow like me does not lose his flesh and colour for ever because he has had a little cold."

"Ay, indeed, a fine *little!* What if the messenger had not come——"

"I should have got well again all the same, and without such a hole being made in my purse," added he, laughing.

"God help you! You are the right sort of man to be able to laugh in time of trouble. But I know that the illness was not the worst of it."

"Yes, indeed it was, otherwise I should have been here at Christmas time, ready to dance at Miss Marie Louise's parties."

"Oh, do not try to deceive the old woman; she sees too clearly for that! But perhaps you mean to cast out your line and hook again—eh?"

"No," answered Williamson, as he relapsed from his feigned cheerfulness into the seriousness which now seldom left him, "No, I shall never angle in that direction again."

"But she was in great trouble about you; that is as certain as day."

"I thank her for it; but nothing more will come of it."

"And she shed tears on this letter here. There! see it yourself! How else could these faint stains have come? I lent them the letter."

"Oh, God knows," answered Williamson, whilst he endeavoured to conceal the emotion which the conjectures of Mistress Utter awakened—"that is quite doubtful. It might just as well be a drop or two out of a glass of water which has fallen on it."

"I do not believe that. I have my own decided opinion about it."

"And if it were tears," continued Williamson, "it was only the short-lived impression of the moment which called them forth. Marie Louise cannot love."

The old woman shook her head doubtingly.

"Let her make herself happy in some grand match. Let her shine, and coquette, and lengthen out as long as possible, the dream which she calls Life. The time will come when she will awake, and then, perhaps, she will devote a tear to him who offered her what now she prizes so little—a warm and true heart."

"I see that you are very positive on this point; but wait, my young man, until you have seen her."

"I will see her; but I shall see her without danger, and I can scarcely believe that in her present position she holds me in remembrance."

"Then, tell me, why she did not accompany the Baroness Segerstad, who, a fortnight ago, went to the capital. The baroness was herself twice there to try and persuade her; and one would have thought that that would have just suited the young lady."

"Yes, I am surprised that she should have failed to secure such a good opportunity for shining in the great world as she does here in a little one; yet here she will have admirers and suitors also."

"Of course! The wholesale dealer, Klamer, and the lieutenant—what do they call him?—he who last year was at our new year's party, they are both paying their court to her. But the lieutenant, they say, is a gamester. God knows whether it is true."

When Williamson was alone, he sat down in the bow window, and looked over at the opposite one, the panes of which were now whitened over with frost, for no one lived there. Alas! his hopes were also frozen!

Although Williamson endeavoured to appear calm, and with all the strength of mind that he possessed to deaden in constant activity his sense of his sorrow at the destruction of all his youthful hopes of happiness, yet the memory of this loss still gnawed even at his heart, and in those hours when he was left undisturbed to his gloomy reflections, instead of being softened, it became still more bitter.

A noble and manly self-appreciation forbade him, however, to reveal his weakness before the woman that he still adored; or to betray, by word, look, or sign, the unconquerable nature of his passion. So proud was he, that even if—which his self-love did not anticipate—Marie Louise should wish to revive his hopes, he would pretend not to understand her. She had despised him because he was poor; he would marry no wife, rich as she might be, who could have cherished such a feeling.

In the meantime Marie Louise waited in the greatest suspense. Already many days had passed since Williamson's return, and he did not appear. At last, one morning, he entered, and after having greeted her mother with the confidence and heartiness of an old friend, he bowed with the greatest politeness to Marie Louise, and with wonderful self-possession congratulated her on the change in her circumstances.

With an evident effort Marie Louise brought out a few unmeaning words. Williamson's tone, his look, his whole deportment, spoke to her only too plainly that he had overcome his former feelings. A deep sigh swelled her heart, but she suppressed it, and started another subject.

The visit did not last long, and in spite of Mrs. N——'s friendly invitations, was not renewed. Yet, on occasions when they had large parties, he would join them, and never forgot, from absence of mind, to ask in good time the young hostess to dance. He gave to their conversation the sportive flight that Marie Louise so loved, without allowing one touch of the feeling of former days to penetrate its tone, and assumed the character of a polished well-bred gentleman, whose only object was to take and give a part in the pleasure of the evening.

When his passion seemed abated, or wholly destroyed, hers became stronger; and the more it developed itself, the more politely cold became his manners. This feeling, which Marie Louise eight months before had been able to master, and which was at that time subordinate to another, threatened now to subdue both reason and pride. It is true she struggled to preserve outward appearances—and really succeeded—but was she mistress of her looks, and, above all, of her own mood and spirits, which varied constantly between unnatural excitement and dejection bordering on despair?

As Williamson paid his last farewell visit before going into the country, as usual in spring, her feelings so overcame her that her efforts at concealment were nearly in vain. The lustre of her eyes was clouded, the joke died on her lips, and her hand, that she extended to him at parting, trembled visibly.

"When shall we see each other again, Mr. Engineer?" asked she, with a forced smile.

"Probably next winter—at least I hope so."

A cold chill fell on Marie Louise's heart, and her head grew dizzy; only with an effort could she support herself, as, bowing her head to him, she left the room.

The months passed slowly away.

Whilst Williamson was striving and working to lay the foundation of a future independence—endeavours that seemed more than ever to be crowned with success—Marie Louise, with secret sighs, dragged on the heavy burthen which life had now become. A part of the summer she spent at Malcolm's-Ness with her mother, a part at the sea-side, and everywhere the young Lieutenant von Walden crossed her path. His attentions were not, however, importunate, since he had penetration enough to partly understand the character of Marie Louise. He managed, however, to make his appearance on all occasions without seeming either presuming or intrusive. On their return from their visit to the sea, he ventured to make a more direct advance towards the aim he had in view, and openly declared himself a suitor.

Aoout this time two other individuals were competing for the honour of Marie Louise's hand, the before-mentioned "wholesale dealer," and a slender young "attaché," whom she held in her chains without the slightest preference for either. At last, however, in compliance with her mother's earnest entreaties that she would come to a decision for or against, these two suitors were finally dismissed, whereupon the lieutenant was encouraged to renew his advances. He obtained, it would seem, but little result.

"In my opinion, my child," said her mother one day to her, "you are making the worst selection, if your choice is to be Von Walden."

"I shall not choose him, mamma."

"Why, then, not dismiss him the same as the others?"

"Because he is the only one whose visits and conversation amuse me; he has a little intellect."

"And, perhaps, a little heart as well," replied her mother. "Have you not trifled enough?"

"Nonsense, mamma! there is as little danger with his heart as with the rest. Men possess a great connoisseurship in the art of forgetting."

"Or in the appearance of forgetting, when their reason has rejected the choice which their hearts once made."

"Is not that a very severe remark, dear mamma?"

"You have been able to judge yourself in the matter, my Marie Louise."

"Yes, alas! but what will be the end of all this? What a life is this to lead!"

Her mother shook her head.

"I really think, I will marry before next autumn; it will vex him, perhaps."

"Hush, my child! Have you so incorrect, or rather so unholy a conception of the sanctity of marriage, that you could possibly form this connexion on such pitiful motives?"

"Ah, mamma! I know not what I would do. I only know that I am unhappy, and that I would joyfully become poor again, to return again to the situation in which I was when we lived in the bow-windowed room."

"Always the same impetuosity!" said her mother, as she laid her hand on the burning brow of her daughter. "We must bear better and more patiently the results of our own folly, my Marie Louise."

CHAPTER XIV.

Forsaken heart,
For my love temple, my grief,
Shall clothe itself in clouds, and deck itself for sacrifice.

In the autumn, Marie Louise and her mother returned to the town, and the same season of the year brought Williamson also back again. Yet once again, for the last time, would Marie Louise try if the die were irrevocably cast. She met Williamson in company; but this winter she became only too surely convinced, that whatever feeling he might still nourish in his heart—and she could scarcely believe that it had been a transient one—he had most earnestly resolved to subdue it.

"Well, then," said she, one day to herself, as the indifferent manner in which he greeted her as he passed the window made her spirits boil with vexation and brought hot tears over her cheeks, "well, then! I also must conquer my feelings—this must all come to an end!" She took up a note mechanically from the table, which had been placed there, she knew not when nor how. Her heart beat as she glanced at the address. Alas! why should she begin to dream again? The note was not from William! She tore it open, however, and saw the signature of Rudolph von Walden.

"Ah!" cried Marie Louise, as she read the elegantly-worded lines in which the lieutenant entreated her to decide on his happiness or misery, "it could not come more opportune!" and, without further consideration, and forgetting that her first duty was to consult her mother, she folded up the note, and wrote her answer:

"Lieutenant von Walden will be welcome this evening, at six o'clock.

"MARIE LOUISE."

She sealed the note with the same haste with which it was written, and only after it had been dispatched, she flew to her mother, and throwing herself with impetuosity into her arms, she exclaimed: "Now is it all over!"

"What, in Heaven's name?" asked her mother, in alarm.

"I have given Von Walden decided hopes, and asked him to come this evening at six o'clock."

"Without telling me?"

"Of what use would it have been? Mamma has been always against him, and yet he is the only one with whom I could bear the thought of passing through life."

"You think, perhaps, that he will always be your obedient slave, because he tunes the strings of his guitar at your pleasure, and sings tender songs? But I beg of you, Marie Louise, —for it is not too late yet, to change this hasty resolution, to which you have been led by a cause too insignificant to be laid in the scale of your whole future happiness. Remember that your mother speaks from bitter and dearly-bought experience, and act not against my advice! I cannot say why it is so, but my heart has a certain foreboding of unhappiness if you adhere to this choice."

"Ah, dear mamma," answered Marie Louise, whose perturbed spirit would not allow her to give a closer consideration or application of her mother's tender words, "believe me, you feel a prejudice against Von Walden, only because he is a poor soldier. At all events, however, he is a man of honour, whom no woman need blush to be the wife of; and I believe, that is, I mean, that I have determined to be right happy with him."

"Marie Louise! Marie Louise! I tremble for you, my poor child!"

"Well, then, give me your hands, dear mamma! Tell me of one bad trait in this man's character, and I will draw back again while there is yet time."

"Would to God I knew of such a trait, instead of only suspecting it," said her mother, sorrowfully; "then, perhaps, I should be happy enough to influence you! All I can do is to entreat you, from my inmost heart, for your mother's sake, not to enter on this engagement!"

Marie Louise walked up and down the room for some minutes without giving any answer. Then, standing before her mother, she spoke in a tone of passion that frightened the tender mother.

"Now then, mamma, I will not enter on this engagement—and I do it all the easier, because it would any how become to me a hateful chain. But mark now what I say: I am not as others; I cannot but be different! The blood often drives through my veins, and it burns like fire when I must force myself to appear cold. Were I to give another man a right to my word and truth, and take upon myself important duties, then I should feel bound and preserved from my most frightful foe: preserved from the power of listening, in a moment of delirium, to the wild ideas that pass through my fancy. Oh, mamma! dearest and only friend, who are so innocent and pure yourself, how can I venture to tell you the sinful thoughts which I have had?" Marie Louise sank at the feet of her mother, and bedewed her hands with her tears.

"Unhappy, misguided child. Will the measure of my grief never be filled!" The tears of the mother were mingled with those of her daughter; long they remained in a silent embrace.

"At least," said Mrs. N——, as she raised Marie Louise's head, and laid her hand upon it, "you must have suffered much, ere the light of your soul could be so overclouded, and I am convinced that your own conscience has already punished you enough. I will not increase the burthen. I will not even ask you to give me a promise, for it might lead to your being tempted to the greatest sin that a human being can commit. But my Marie Louise in confiding in her mother has gained a victory over herself."

"Ah, yes! I feel that this is my best place of refuge. But nevertheless, dissuade me not from this marriage, but let us conclude all this evening. Believe me, believe me, dear mother, I shall be more calm when I have some definite object for which to live."

"In the name of God, then," said her mother, with a heart filled with anguish, "only one thing will I add, and preserve these words in your inmost soul: when you have once formed this engagement, which is to last for life, remember that not a thought or feeling must be untrue to him to whom you have given all."

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On the day after this important crisis in Marie Louise's life, the report of her betrothal spread through the town, and reached at last the house of the counsellor.

"Now we will see whether the bells do not ring another tune," said the old lady, as she went up stairs to the apartment of the engineer, whose dwelling was now increased by the addition of the parlour, since he had no less than three assistants, who worked at the different windows.

Mistress Utter was accustomed to call this room "the office," when she boasted to her acquaintances of the important business and profitable employment of her little engineer, whom she always considered as her own property.

Williamson sat in his old place in the bow-window, and was writing.

"Welcome, Aunt Gretchen," and he hastily cleared a chair for the old lady.

She carefully shut the door.

"Now, William, hast thou heard nothing new?"

"Nothing remarkable, except that Pellander, who was here just now, has come into the town to awaken justice from her slumbers."

"How so?"

"It is about a warrant to be served by the burgomaster, which has been too long delayed, because it was against his relation, the Lieutenant Walden."

"Surely not!"

"Yes, indeed. Pellander has now received full authority from the creditors to bring the affair to a speedy conclusion, and unless the lieutenant finds some means of leading our advocate into temptation, whose toleration and humanity are well known on such occasions, I suspect the lieutenant will have to leave the town in rather more inconvenient a manner than he is accustomed to travel."

"Oh, no danger of that. He will soon find means to bring his affairs into order. Hast thou heard nothing new besides?"

"No—what then?" asked Williamson, and his cheek assumed a deeper die.

"Marie Louise was betrothed yesterday to Lieutenant Walden."

"Oh, that is scandalous!" cried Williamson, starting up.

"Scandalous! is not that saying too much?"

"Too much! no, certainly not. To be seeking a wife at the same moment that he is about to be imprisoned for debt! She must not be sacrificed. But who can warn her?"

"Hast thou any advantage in her being warned?"

"I think not of my own advantage or injury—I think only of her, before whom I see a bottomless abyss."

"But, my dear little William, this is not the worst thing that a man in his case can do."

"If it were not, he would have done something yet worse, the wretch——" Williamson broke off suddenly, and added more calmly—"But, by Heavens! she shall not rush into destruction unwarned. She may judge of me as she pleases—my behaviour for a long while has shown that I do not act from self-interest. I will speak with her mother, and even with Marie Louise herself if it be necessary."

"But calm thyself, and reflect——"

"There is no time for reflection. I will go over to them this evening. Yet stay—I should certainly meet the lieutenant there. It must be done immediately, since he is probably in a hurry to settle his affairs as soon as possible. I will go this very moment."

Williamson dressed himself quickly; and scarcely half an hour elapsed after he received the intelligence, which, in spite of his resolutions, had shaken his inmost soul, ere he stood in the anteroom of the suite of apartments occupied by Marie Louise and her mother.

From the inner room Mrs. N—— heard his voice, and came immediately to receive him.

With the same feeling, not of confusion, but of reciprocal uneasiness, they met, and on her part this was not diminished when Williamson seated himself by her side on the sofa, and with a somewhat faltering voice, said—

"I come on an affair of great importance: will Mrs. N—— permit an old friend to speak without circumlocution?"

"Most willingly," stammered she. She trembled lest Williamson might be wishing to renew his proposals now, when it was too late. But she was soon convinced of her mistake, when Williamson, changing colour, continued,—

"Miss Marie Louise was yesterday betrothed; may I ask if you are intimately acquainted with the individual who has received your daughter's consent?"

"No, God knows! not in the least."

"I imagined so; and although I should be the last to allude to these reports, yet my conscience will not permit me to see this engagement formed without giving you an opportunity of judging to what consequences it may lead."

"Speak on, speak on, my good Mr. Engineer."

"In the first place, Lieutenant Walden is not only ruined, but he is involved in a number of not very honourable affairs, which are principally the result of his passion for play. A proof of this at the present moment—and I trust you will not think me to blame for mentioning it—is that the burgomaster, from motives easy to guess without encroaching on truth, has delayed for a long time the issue of a writ which was to be served against him. This very day the attorney of the creditors is in the town, and in what manner the matter will be settled one can well imagine, now that Lieutenant Walden's new connexion is known."

"Oh, my forebodings! my forebodings! I never thought well of the man."

"And yet," continued Williamson, "this, in my opinion, is the least part of the affair, since this is unfortunately by no means an unusual circumstance, and sooner or later must have reached your ears. But what I have to add, nothing but the importance of the occasion obliges me to reveal, since it has been told me in confidence. Lieutenant Walden, scarcely a month ago, and at the same time that he was laying his fate in the hands of Miss Marie Louise, proposed for the plain but wealthy daughter of the Baroness G——. He was determined to save himself by one means or the other. If fortune were unfavourable to him here, it would, he thought, be more kind in the other direction. The baroness, who suspected that he had only the large property of her daughter in view, had not yet answered, but had decided on a refusal, and in the meantime Miss Marie Louise has given her consent."

"What a tale is this!" Mistress N—— blushed, and her voice trembled.

"It requires proofs," rejoined Williamson, "which I have here." He drew out of his breast pocket a letter, addressed to the Baroness G——, and signed Rudolph von Walden.

"In the name of Heaven, how came this in the hands of the engineer?"

"In the most simple manner. For some time I have been in correspondence with this lady, respecting the division of an estate between herself and a neighbour. I was so happy as to win her confidence, and before sending her answer to Lieutenant von Walden, she was pleased to confide to me this proposal, and begged me, as I lived in the same town as the lieutenant, to furnish her with some particulars respecting his character and his affairs, both of which seemed to her somewhat doubtful."

"And what answer did you give?"

"That I knew nothing of him, except that he had been for some time a suitor to your daughter; but that the result was yet unknown. By return of post the baroness sent me this letter, which proved his contemptible double dealing, and charged me to send it back to the lieutenant in an empty cover, when he was in the company of your daughter. I ought to have executed this commission yesterday; but it can be done as well to-day, after it has, as I trust, thrown sufficient light upon Lieutenant von Walden's proceedings."

"Ah! my dear Engineer Williamson, this is, indeed, a convincing proof. And yet I fear ——"

"How? Would your daughter under such circumstances— It is not possible!"

"Nothing is more difficult than to see beforehand how Marie Louise will take a matter, and least of all this. But if Mr. Engineer will oblige me still further, promise me to speak to her yourself."

"Not willingly, my good lady. It is too tender a point—in a word, your daughter would think—No; I must, indeed, beg that you will spare me."

"Say no more. Mr. Engineer, you shall not escape me. Have the goodness to remain, I hear Marie Louise in the next room. I will prepare her beforehand. Do not be impatient if we detain you some time," and she disappeared. The good woman thought that no one could influence Marie Louise so well as Williamson. We shall see whether she judged her daughter rightly. What passed in the other room has not reached our knowledge, since only broken words reached Williamson's ear as he stood leaning against the mantel-piece in the most painful state of mind. He almost repented having undertaken an affair which, whether it succeeded or not, might cast a shadow on himself. Who would trouble themselves about the purity of his motives, who believe that, should he succeed in overthrowing his rival, he would not wish to renew his former addresses? No one could really tell, but many, perhaps, would guess; indeed, Marie Louise herself might believe that selfish calculations had been the ground of his interference.

These considerations were inexpressibly bitter to Williamson; but now that the step was taken, he could not retreat, and whatever might arise out of it, he would always have a consolation in the consciousness that even at the risk of sacrificing her good opinion of him, he had endeavoured to save her. She should not, at all events, run into danger blindfolded.

It seemed an eternity to Williamson, until the door was softly opened, and Marie Louise appeared on the threshold.

They had never been together alone since the important moment, when, through her unconquerable pride, she had discarded her lover. Again they stood face to face; he grave and deeply moved internally, she with calm dignity, without a trace of any clouds having passed over her brow.

Marie Louise was ever most undecided in character when a matter was in question about which she had to come to a resolution. Once having decided, however, she advanced determinately forwards, let her meet what hindrances she might. It followed from this that her betrothal, which had only taken place a few hours before, assumed in her eyes the sanctity of marriage, and she looked upon her own honour as involved in that of the man to whom she had united her fate, and who was to share her fortune. Had she thought otherwise—had she not considered a mere betrothal as so indissoluble an engagement, she would not, perhaps, in this painfully decisive moment, have rejected the man who then, now, and for ever, was worshipped by her in her inmost heart.

"Ever most welcome, Mr. Engineer," said she, in the tone of politeness with which one speaks to intimate acquaintances. "I cannot but be very grateful to you for the well-intentioned purpose that brings you here; but in addition to the explanation that mamma has given, another is necessary, which I beg to be allowed to make."

Williamson was as if he had fallen from the clouds. There stood this woman, who, as he knew for certain, still loved him, who would, he imagined, appear amid tears and violent emotion to thank him for his zeal, or to upbraid him, or if not, who would at least display in an interview with him a certain degree of fear and timid uneasiness—there she stood perfectly self-possessed, and spoke in the tone of a polite acquaintance, and as if he had come to make a most unimportant communication. Wholly perplexed by this presence of mind, of which he could himself boast still less and less, he stood, for want of an appropriate answer, in silent expectation of the explanation she announced.

"As to the first part of the story," said Marie Louise, with as much assurance as if it were the most perfect truth, "I must explain that it was already known to me—" she perceived with satisfaction Williamson's evident astonishment,—"that at the same time, or rather before Lieutenant von Walden sought my hand, he communicated to me the disorder in his pecuniary affairs, which circumstances, however, I did not consider as any hindrance to an engagement I had already decided on. As to this letter"—she laid it on the table before him—"I will not allow myself to remark on the misuse which has been made of it. I will only observe that I shall never allow Von Walden to know that I have seen it, since at the time it was written there was no engagement between us; therefore he was quite at liberty to propose for whom he pleased. And I suppose that he considered the delay in the sending of an answer equivalent to a refusal, and a proof of his being at liberty to renew his proposals to me, which he did yesterday."

"From all this," rejoined Williamson, as he folded up the letter, "I perceive that I might have spared myself my trouble—but one is unfortunately seldom able to calculate beforehand the utility of such attempts. It is my duty to believe a lady's word, and at all events, her mode of action in this matter is worthy of all admiration. Nevertheless, Miss Marie Louise, do not leave these facts, which I have laid before you, without consideration—they speak for themselves, and permit me——"

"No, Mr. Engineer," interrupted Marie Louise; "I cannot allow that the person with whom I have united my destiny should be any longer the subject of such a conversation between us; and I must also say, that I do not consider that I have anything to do with what has passed before my betrothal with Lieutenant von Walden. That is his affair, not mine."

"And whatever may be considered to weigh against the character of the lieuteuant, has no value in the eyes of his betrothed bride?"

"No value."

"Pardon me, young lady—but if I may be allowed to speak with sincerity, I would ask if this may not with propriety be called wilful blindness?"

"Possibly," answered Marie Louise; "but it is at the same time my principle."

The blood rushed to Williamson's head. His irritation had for some time struggled with a better feeling, a feeling that spoke warmly for Marie Louise, even when it was evident that she was willing to let herself be led into destruction. A sharp answer died on his lips, and, in a tone of inward mildness, he said: "I fear that this principle may be the cause of incalculable mischief in the future. Ah, Marie Louise," continued he, in greater emotion, "believe the friend who knows no higher interest than your happiness. He can have no bad motive. Consider it well, I conjure you, Marie Louise!"

"Not this tone, for God's sake! Leave me. We have nothing more to say to each other. Thanks, thanks for all; but it has come too late!" and Marie Louise disappeared.

In the gloomiest temper of mind Williamson returned home.

Marie Louise had despised his advice, his good will; she had, perhaps, suspected him of a deep plan, and seeing the turn which the affair had now taken, he repented that he had adopted this means to point out to her her danger.

CHAPTER XV.

What can my prayers avail me?—what my tears?
Stands not my sentence deeply now engraved
Indelibly on Fate's recording page?
Wherefore now efforts, hopes, desires, or fears?
What can I now attain, and what now lose?
RANEBERG.

Two hours after Williamson's visit, with radiant looks, Lieutenant von Walden entered the apartment of his betrothed. He was happy, happier even than the day before, when he had received her assent, for this day he had received Pellander's assent, and the latter, for a respectable douceur, had promised to persuade his creditors that the debts would be much sooner paid by leaving the lieutenant in peace to get married, than by throwing him into prison.

"How are you to-day, my beloved Marie Louise?" asked the quickly alarmed lover, as he saw her, with cheeks as pale as marble, leaning back on a sofa.

"Not quite well, and considering the report that has been spread all over the town this morning, and therefore came even to my knowledge, I should not have expected to see you so cheerful."

Von Walden, uncertain what report she meant—for a thousand possibilities passed through his head—was too wise, however, to expose himself on any point that could be concealed. He looked, therefore, at his betrothed with an inquiring glance.

"The affair with the advocate Pellander."

"Ah! how provoking these little townspeople are. The whole place meddles with the affairs of individuals. I assure you, my love, this is quite a trifle, not worthy of your attention, and that is, besides, already arranged."

"By undertaking to settle your obligations in two month's time—do I guess right? It was, I think, just two months from this time that, at your urgent entreaty, I fixed for our marriage?"

Von Walden blushed deeply, yet answered, in the most fascinating manner: "Six weeks, my angel."

"Yes, so it was; but you would, at all events, require a couple of weeks to make yourself acquainted with your newly acquired possessions."

"You wish to offend me, dearest Marie Louise."

"Far from it; I only wish that we should understand each other rightly. Your circumstances are greatly involved, and nothing is more natural than that you should seek to bring them into order again."

"Ah, Marie Louise! My beloved, adored Marie Louise! You will not believe that from such a motive I have endeavoured with such zeal to secure the happiness that you have at last conferred?"

"In the position in which we stand one to another," replied Marie Louise, "I think it is best that we should show each other always perfect confidence, and in order to make a beginning, I will openly speak my mind. I believe that this wish lay principally at the bottom of your calculations, but that you have at the same time sufficient personal inclination for me as will make the consciousness of being an opulent man all the more agreeable; in a word, I do not doubt but that in the case —I merely put a case—had you been able to secure the hand of a rich and ugly woman, you would have preferred me, if it depended on your own choice."

Von Walden stood literally petrified. Maric Louise must also know—what was to be done? Nothing else was left him than to follow the example of sincerity which she had set him. But he must use *finesse*, and not be too open.

The result of this reflection was, that Von Walden threw himself at the feet of his betrothed, and seizing her hand, stammered out: "Marie Louise, can you forgive me?"—it happened in a moment of frenzy and despair, when I had lost all hope of possessing you. But I revoked the foolish step immediately."

"You?"

"Yes, upon my honour!"

"And if you had not done so, would you have accepted the hand of this heiress?"

"Would he," answered the lieutenant, with an insinuating voice, "who had conquered Marie Louise, have to fear a refusal from a little Medusa?"

"No, that is going too far!" said Marie Louise, in a tone that sounded very cutting in the ear of a betrothed lover. She was not cold, not excited; but she expressed something worse than either.

"What do you mean by that, my love?"

"That you must have a very short memory—yet let us leave this subject! You will always find me disposed to shut my ears to all that may reach my knowledge concerning your past life. But, mark well, in all that you may do in future I shall take a part! Should your honour be stained, so will also be mine—yet I trust that you will commit no actions at which I could have to blush."

"No, by Heaven! you more than mortal, ideal woman, with these elevated sentiments which so few of your sex possess! Believe me—I swear it faithfully—my whole life shall be consecrated to you and honour!—never will I have a secret from you; never commit an action that I must conceal from your pure eyes."

The lieutenant was in the clouds. He had fancied himself on the brink of an abyss, and through a miracle, he knew not how, he was restored to blessedness again.

"God grant," said Marie Louise, earnestly, "that you may keep this promise. As soon as we are married, your hands will be free, since, to bind you more securely, I am ready to bestow full confidence in you. Mamma has done all in her power to persuade me to consent to a settlement; but he to whom I give my hand must also be master of all that I possess. Should you abuse my confidence, then—but I will not think of anything so frightful!"

"You will not, beloved Marie Louise, because your cannot think so contemptibly of the man whom you have chosen to be your husband. I take God to witness that I mean honourably, and that I acknowledge no higher study than to secure your happiness."

"That—" Marie Louise passed her hand across her brow—"yet no matter! Hear me now further: as I have told you, you are about to become master of all my property, therefore you must immediately set your affairs in order, so that we may be free from the remembrance of them; after that you must become regular, strictly regular, in all your transactions, if you wish to win my esteem and preserve it, since poor will I never become again."

"Nor I neither," asserted Von Walden, most sincerely, from his heart. "I should long ago have become a most regular and steady man, if I had possessed something certain to live upon; but a poor man can only keep himself afloat through activity."

When this certainly not very sentimental conversation between the betrothed lovers was ended, Von Walden, with the privilege of a lover and betrothed husband, attempted to play a part which would suit better the connexion which had been entered into four-and-twenty hours before, but this attempt was cut short immediately, by Marie Louise declaring that she hated all love-making. They could, she said, love each other quite as well without it, and she knew nothing more tiresome than two betrothed lovers billing and cooing like doves, and feeding on kisses.

"But the food is divine!" rejoined the lieutenant.

"For those who like it, perhaps—but to me it is almost nauseous."

"Heavens! how prosaic! What shall I do, then, with my heart glowing with love?"

"You have got rid of it, as you have given it to me," said she, with forced cheerfulness.

"Good; but unfortunately one cannot give it so completely away but what a part will be left which suffers for the rest."

"No, those are quite too *fade* remarks—think of something more interesting by the time you come again. Now I have letters to write!" and Marie Louise dismissed very abruptly the future disposer of her fate.

The letter that she wished to write was to the Baroness Charlotte, whom she must make acquainted with the change that had taken place in her situation. But not one word did she speak of the discovery which had been made of the character of her betrothed, nor of her last interview with Williamson. Her communication, however, to her clear-sighted friend, revealed very plainly that at the moment it was written she was far from being as happy, or as much at ease, as she endeavoured to represent.

The short period of freedom left to Marie Louise came soon to an end. The anxious loving mother sighed deeper and deeper as the important day approached; but Marie Louise had ever at hand a flattering caress, or a consolatory word. Never had she been so loving, so warm, so humble or attentive, as now. Yet nothing could appease the mother's anxious heart; it penetrated the veil that Marie Louise had cast over her inmost feelings, and it trembled to think that she might be wounded by the thorns with which she played.

During the three announcement-days,* friends and acquaintances streamed into the house of Mrs. N——. Williamson paid a hasty visit one morning, in company with Counsellor Utter. Mistress Utter ought, of course, to have been at one of the great coffee parties, but as Von Walden would be present, and Williamson considered it too great a trial to his feelings, she declined going, with more readiness than, under other circumstances, she would have done.

On the 16th of February, the great house in the Market-place shone brilliantly with the light of chandeliers and candelabras. The uninvited part of the population of the town crowded, full of curiosity, around the house, to catch a sight of the bride, as she showed herself occasionally at the windows, now accompanied by her enraptured bridegroom, and now surrounded by her bridesmaids.

"She never looked so little pretty as this evening," said one of the more genteel of the class of ladies whom maidservants, in taking their messages, entitle 'Madame' — "her eyes are so swollen and red."

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* In Sweden, Germany, &c., after a betrothal, cards are sent out, and visits formally paid and received. The connexion is thus considered of a much more binding nature than a mere engagement in England. It is rare that any circumstances occur to separate a betrothed couple, and the engagement cannot be broken up without considerable odium being reflected on the lady.

"Ah, but she is so elegant, so elegant!" cried another. "A bride's face is of no importance. Look at that flouncing—four rows of blond! And that stiff silk—how lucky she is! Oh that I were in her place!"

"She is not, perhaps, so very happy, after all," said a third. "I know Ma'mselle Henriette, and she said to me this morning, as I was there on business, that the young lady did not sleep the whole of last night, but was walking up and down her room, and that even to-day she is rather strange."

"Oh, that she always was, the haughty little thing!" said the fourth speaker. "She never knew rightly on what foot to stand, and it will be still worse now that she has a carriage to ride in. My husband has had the lining and stuffing of the elegant new carriage to do, and made the liveries of the two lacqueys that are running about here and there."

As this was going on, there sat in the gloomy twilight a person leaning over the little table that stood in the bow-window. It was Williamson, who had put on his uniform with the intention of making one of the wedding guests; but when the time had come for going, he had lost all power to move from the spot. Motionless he sat, with his eyes fixed on the opposite bow-window: it looked as gloomy and desolate as the grave!

What can my prayers avail me ?—what my tears ?
Wherefore now efforts, hopes, desire, or fears ?
What can I now attain, and what now lose ?

The counsellor had already gone to the wedding; but Mistress Utter, who would not afford herself a new black silk dress for an occasion which caused her so much grief, had remained at home. She knew that Williamson intended to go, and as all was still in his room she concluded that he had set off; and, taking a light, tripped up the stairs to his room, in order to set it a little to rights. In the outer room, the two young assistants were gossiping over their writing tables; they also concluded that their master had gone out. But, Heavens! how startled was aunt Gretchen as she entered, and saw him whom she believed to be among the wedding guests seated as motionless as death at the table. In a second she reached him, and seizing him by the arm—"William! William! my dear young man! What is the matter with thee? Look at me, then!"

"Yes, yes," said William, as he wiped the cold sweat from his brow, "I ought to be at Marie Louise's wedding, ought I not?"

"But it is now too late, dear child," said the old lady, with suppressed tears, for never had she seen her dear William in the state he now seemed. He was so pale, that there seemed to be scarcely a drop of blood flowing in his veins.

"No, not too late, dear aunt! I will, I must see her as a bride!"

"Nay, my dear, that must thou not think of! She has cost thee enough already; and people would laugh were they to see thee as thou lookest now—people, I mean, who do not know better."

"What? you think that I should be laughed at?"

"Yes, yes; it might so happen. But see now, my dear little William, here is some one who will not laugh at thee, and who would willingly give the rest of her old life if she could purchase back the happiness that thou hast lost. Come, now, and sit thee down by the old woman's side on the sofa, and let her talk a little with thee."

"Oh, no! I cannot talk! It is so close here—there is no air. I must go out a little."

"No, that thou shalt not. We will take off this tight coat,—that oppresses thee, without anything else. See, dear William, here is thy loose frock-coat. When we feel ourselves quite at home, we are more comfortable."

The old lady induced him to take off his wedding dress, which she laid again in the wardrobe, that it might not awaken painful recollections, and with especial care she hid the sword, of which, in her excited imagination, she had great fear. Now sat Williamson on the sofa, at the side of his best and truest friend, and let her speak, do, and behave as she would, whilst, still absorbed in thought, he gazed on the opposite house.

"Alas, alas! thou hearest me not!" exclaimed the old lady, and pressed his hand.

"I will listen to all this afterwards," said he. "Let me only throw my cloak round me. I must go out. I have made up my mind to see her this evening."

"Well, then, go, in God's name! But let me go with thee—we can disguise ourselves a little, and mingle in the crowd of common people."

Williamson sprang up eagerly: "Thanks, hearty thanks!" said he. "Let us make haste."

"Yes, take thy cloak and hat, and wait patiently a little while down stairs whilst I dress. But, my dear William, in return for going with you, must you promise me faithfully and truly, that we shall turn back again directly you have seen her."

"Yes; I desire no more."

And arm-in-arm went the old woman and the young man to the Market-place. No one showed that they knew them, but from the readiness with which room was made for them as they passed through the crowd, Mistress Utter felt sure that they were recognised. A short distance from the house, she stopped. "Draw thine hat down over thine eyes, and pull up thy collar," whispered she.

Williamson heard her not, for his wish was already fulfilled. Followed by her bridesmaids, with lights in their hands, the bride appeared at the window, as if brought by a secret warning.* She looked down into the street upon the dark mass of human beings, among which no individual form could be recognised, but the influence of a foreboding was perhaps upon her heart, for this time, as when she had showed herself before, she could not smile. Her lips trembled as she bowed low and gravely. After a few minutes, she disappeared from the window.

"Shall we go now?" whispered Mistress Utter, and pulled Williamson gently by the arm.

"Yes."

And in the little sitting-room of his hostess, where he had passed so many cheerful and happy hours, sat Williamson, the whole evening, extremely calm. Indeed, he was so unexpectedly resigned, that the old lady feared for him. But later in the evening the restraint which he had put upon himself was thrown off. Pacing up and down the room with his hands pressed over his eyes, aunt Gretchen could see the tears streaming through his fingers.

After this relief, his power over himself returned, and his old friend could have wept herself tears of joy at seeing her dear little engineer himself again, if she could have ventured to acknowledge that she had seen the struggle.

"Thanks, thanks, dearest Aunt Gretchen!—this is all that I can say," said Williamson, as they parted on this bitter and trying night. "My own mother could not have been more to me at such a moment."

"Do not make the old woman too proud. She acted only from selfishness: thy happiness is also hers."

"But without this noble selfishness," said Williamson, as he embraced her with emotion, "I should not have been now what I am, and," added he, for he suspected that she had seen his weakness, "God gave woman tears with which to vent her grief, but to man, with whom they are strange guests, they help him to recover strength and courage."

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* In Sweden, a bride shows herself in this manner to her neighbours on her wedding day.

Praising God went old Mistress Utter to rest, and slept long and well, whilst Williamson, in silent sorrow, lay looking across at Marie Louise's window, on whose frosted panes the moon shone so brightly. And, raised above all trivial thoughts, he prayed for her and for himself!

CHAPTER XVI.

How memorable was the hour—
Full of light, from thousand suns—
Full of bliss and harmony!
VON BRAUN.

Yes—are we not indeed happy?
MELLIN.

IT was eight days after the wedding.

Marie Louise reclined on a sofa in her boudoir, wrapped in an elegant morning dress. Her hand held a book, whilst her eyes rested, not without a certain degree of satisfaction, on the handsome form of her husband, who, seated on a stool at her feet, struck the strings of a guitar, and accompanied its feeble sounds with a voice neither weak nor feminine, but which had a right manly tone.

"My lady's carriage is at the door," announced a servant in the livery of the Von Walden family.

Marie Louise replied to the intelligence by a slight bend of her head; but, when her husband had ended the song he was singing, she said, in a friendly tone, "I will not ask you to accompany me to-day! Now and then it is as well to take the air alone."

"As you will, my angel. It is a sacrifice which you impose on me." Walden kissed his wife's hand politely: "But it is to be hoped the sun will not disappear for a long time?"

"Ah, my good Walden, if you would only lay aside those worn-out and trivial phrases, which really mean nothing! Shall we pay some visits this evening?"

"Certainly, if you think it right, my beloved! As these well-meaning people are determined to interrupt our domestic bliss with their invitations, I suppose we should, as a compensation for their trouble, bestow a short visit on them."

"Yes, so I think also."

"And ever thus, my adored Marie Louise, will our opinions agree on every subject! Harmony is the foundation of all wedded bliss!"

"That is true, my friend! But now I must dress. May I beg of you to ring the bell?"

"Ring? what are you thinking of, my divine one? I shall make a point of waiting on you myself. You only require your cloak and shawl, and I allow no one to fasten your shoes but myself—and see, everything is lying ready in your bed-chamber," and with cheerful alacrity, the newly married husband busied himself around his bride with more devotion than a lover.

"Well, then, as you will have it so!" and Marie Louise stretched out her foot on a footstool.

"Ah, what an exquisite foot. I defy Venus herself to show one equal to it."

"I entreat you, in the name of Heaven, my friend," said Marie Louise, impatiently, "to leave off such a bombastic manner of speaking. The horses have, besides, waited so long, and the coachman must be half frozen."

"What does that matter, my goddess! Horses and coachmen are made to wait. Now, where is your fur? What a tasteful dress—how well it sits. Nothing becomes you so well as blue, excepting pink——"

"And yellow, and white, I suppose?" added Marie Louise.

"Yes, of course; for everything becomes you. But this little violet-coloured velvet bonnet beats everything. One can see plainly that the dahlia in it is a true Parisian. You ought to let me go with you, to enjoy the admiration that you will excite."

This last remark drew a smile from Marie Louise, for from the windows she knew there would be many a look cast on her; but to her husband, she said: "Do you think that I am so vain as that such a little motive should make me change my wish to go alone?" an intimation which Walden, as a polite man, did not oppose.

Meanwhile he followed his young wife to the carriage, put down the steps, and presented his hand to assist her in.

A foot-passenger passed at this moment, and bowed.

"Good God! I really do believe you are trembling, my angel; are you ill?"

"No, I was only afraid of the impatience of the horses. Adieu! adieu! I shall soon return." She seated herself erect in the carriage, and Von Walden closed the door after he had pressed a light kiss on the hand of his bride.

"Where does my lady wish me to drive to?" asked the coachman.

"To the east gate."

The carriage flew on. Marie Louise greeted her husband again, and would then have sunk into a corner of the carriage, and yielded herself up to her concealed emotions, had she not remarked that attention was directed to her from every window as she drove past. She was supported by the fear of observation. Full of graciousness, and without any of the signs of pride, of which she was usually accused, she greeted courteously all her friends and acquaintances. But as she drove past her former dwelling, and saw the frosted windows, and thought on the past and the present, then feeling asserted its dominion. Fortunately, she was soon through the street and out on the high road, where, in undisturbed solitude, she sunk back in the carriage, and gave herself up to the reflections and emotions which crowded into her mind.

"No; I must away from here," was her only clear thought. "This exceeds all human efforts. No duty, however holy it may be, can deliver us from the power of imagination, which ever returns to the same objects."

In despair, half in a kind of delirium, had Marie Louise resolved on her marriage. She wished to adopt a powerful means of tearing the passion from her breast which disturbed her peace. For this to succeed, she must not be for ever under the eyes of him whose very name revived it. Marie Louise, now that this marriage was accomplished, had formed a strong and determined resolution that she would, as a sort of atonement for her former folly, perform to her utmost the duties of the state she had entered. She felt no antipathy to Von Walden, but at the same time no particular liking. He was good-natured, cheerful, and attentive; and, in a word, he was agreeable.

"Alas! yes; he is agreeable enough," sighed Marie Louise, for it presented itself to her mind, how modest she was in her requirements, since she was not able to bestow her heart upon him. This, Von Walden also knew in secret; but he easily comforted himself over it, provided only that she showed him friendliness.

After eight days more, which were passed in all kinds of feasting and entertainments, Marie Louise said one evening to her husband, "I am so fond of seeing spring coming on from the very beginning, that, if you have no objection, let us remove to Malcolm's-Ness?"

"That is a sudden and quite unexpected resolution, my angel."

"Ah! yes, I confess it—but so it is. I have my little whims. Have you not remarked that?"

"No, indeed, I have not."

"Well, then, my friend," continued Marie Louise, in an insinuating tone, "it is not too soon, if you discover it after a fortnight's marriage! I have a most intense desire to see Malcolm's-Ness just now."

"But my affairs, which I ought to be arranging at this time?"

"You could arrange them far better out in the country, where you will be quite undisturbed. And you are quite sure that your creditors, either in person or by letter, will find you out wherever you are."

"That is true—but the country at this season! If you want to travel, why should we not undertake a longer journey, more suited to a newly-married pair? We could not enter upon the gaieties of Stockholm at a better time. Oh! what a triumph it would be for me to introduce such a bride there! You smile, my beloved, and I perceive that you are not quite indifferent to all the admiration that you must receive wherever you go."

"No, you are deceived, my good Walden. I was not smiling at that. The sort of happiness that you picture to me, and which is not without its attractions for a woman, I can enjoy another winter. But I have so often heard you enlarge upon the heavenly bliss of the so-called honeymoon, that I did not expect you would be ready so soon to exchange heaven for the earth. Besides, I remember, on the contrary, that all newly-married couples go into the country to enjoy in solitude the delight of each other's society undisturbed. Only after some considerable time do they begin to draw a circle of friends around them, and seek the pleasures of society."

With a half ironical, half coquettish smile, the young wife spoke these words, which, contrary to her usual custom, were followed by a slight caress.

"Both now and for ever must it be as you wish, you irresistible one!" answered he. "But one thing I must beg, which is, that you will not take it ill if I were to invite a couple of fellows, good old friends of mine, who, with their agreeable society, will increase our domestic enjoyment."

"Such invitations for any length of time," said Marie Louise, "are not quite in accordance with my taste, but——"

"But in all country-houses *comme il faut*, they are the custom, my treasure. When one leaves town, one invites friends to come to one. That you will find," continued he, laughing, "in all first-rate English novels as well as Swedish, and even in real life."

"Against such decisive evidence I know not what to offer. Invite, then, whom you please; but visits in the neighbourhood we need not pay so soon? I am tired of these eternal parties, and am determined to be quiet."

"Superb, my angel! People shall admire our devotion to each other, which only requires a hermitage to complete our happiness; and they will say: 'The new proprietors of Malcolm's-Ness are expected everywhere, and they let their neighbours expect. They certainly are determined to carry it with a high hand.'"

Some days after this conversation the young couple removed to Malcolm's-Ness. Mrs. N—— did not accompany them; she declined, on the grounds that she preferred living in the town.

Marie Louise had not seen Williamson since her marriage, except on the morning of her first ride. He had not gone to any of the entertainments which had followed the wedding.

More, even, than the visiting of the town, did the journey into the country afford the newly married pair opportunities of becoming acquainted with their mutual habits and peculiarities, so as to convince them that they were not the most interesting company to each other. Yet each did what they could on their own part to convince themselves of the contrary. He related anecdotes of his youthful days—anecdotes of drawing-room and barrack adventures. She listened, smiled, gaped rather frequently, and in return related particulars of the dear Segerstad, and her regrets that its possessors should be away, and pictured the pleasure which their return in the spring would afford. All this was very well; but it allowed the travellers time now and then to sleep, or at least to pretend that they did.

At last they reached home. But after the effort which they had made on the road, there was something cold in the manner and way of their entering on their solitude during this portion of the honeymoon.

The first week Von Walden employed in arranging his affairs; that is to say, what was absolutely necessary; for in spite of his promise to Marie Louise, either through old habit, or because the passing of money through his hands was too enticing, he discharged only such claims as were the most pressing. All those which could be possibly left unpaid he allowed to stand over. "For," said he to himself, "rich or poor, it is easy enough to find old debts without seeking them out oneself." Besides this, a number of useful things were now wanting; such as riding horses, hounds, and an improved condition of the cellar; and, moreover, various unavoidable alterations in the arrangements of the rooms and the furniture left by the deceased cousin Malcolm.

Whilst her husband was busy with these important concerns, Marie Louise was occupied in arranging her large household, hiring cook, and housekeeper, and maids of every description. She was determined herself to keep a watchful eye on all. Accustomed to habits of industry, occupation was at this time doubly welcome, as a diversion to her thoughts, and she soon began to take actual pleasure in her vocation as housewife.

In the evening the young couple usually met at the tea-table.

"You are working yourself to death, my dear Marie Louise," said, on one of these occasions, the yet attentive husband. "Let the servants do all these things."

"The servants require superintendence, which they have been so long without," answered the young wife. "I am mistress of the house now, and I will play my part well."

"And I am master of the house, my love," said Von Walden, laughing. "But the d—l take me—excuse me, that was an accidental reminiscence of my bachelor life—if I am able to perform my part with half the dignity which you put on in yours. Upon my honour, you are quite a charming Ma'mselle Rylander, when, with your little polka jacket, and handkerchief over your head, you go into the kitchen and pantry, and everywhere bring about such diligence, and such a spirit of order, as makes me downright mad if by chance I put my nose in."

"Be so good as to place the fire-screen here, my friend," was Marie Louise's answer to this domestic raillery. But for the first time it occurred to the lieutenant that it was not quite becoming in a wife to cool down, with a couple of indifferent words, his witty efforts to be entertaining. To point this out, he determined to play the husband, and said to the servant who was entering: "Your mistress wishes to have the screen nearer the fire-place; do not forget to attend to this another time."

To Walden's vexation, Marie Louise pretended not to observe his delicate hint. On the contrary, she took advantage of the presence of the servant to give him another commission.

When the master and mistress were alone, Von Walden, fearful that his assumed dignity should not have produced the desired effect, said: "You are not offended, I hope, my dear Marie Louise?"

"About what?" asked she, negligently.

"That I gave the servant your command."

"No, certainly. He had nothing else to do."

"What a heavenly Satan!" thought the lieutenant; but as he did not wish her to observe his disappointed hope of annoying her, and getting materials for a little retort, he said, cheerfully, "The evenings in our hermitage are rather long; would you not like to learn some game to play with me?"

"Why not?" answered Marie Louise. "Chess I know already, if you would like to play it."

"Ah, no! That is so wearisome, and requires—but the dogs are barking—perhaps——" and Von Walden went to the window to listen.

"Perhaps you are so fortunate as to have a partner for your game just at the right moment."

"Positively, my angel, I do believe it is my two friends! They are come, upon my honour! They are come as if sent by Providence!"

Von Walden had guessed rightly; the travellers were the expected intimate friends, who, after they had set their dress a little to rights, entered, led by their host, who introduced them as

Major A—— and Captain G——. At the beginning of her acquaintanceship with these gentlemen, Marie Louise found this interruption to their solitude not unpleasant. It afforded a little change, which it must be confessed was already desirable.

To the amusements now entered upon was added that of horse riding. Marie Louise was soon persuaded to learn this delightful art, and charmed her husband by the readiness to which she consented to the proposal; and Von Walden gained through it a little business to transact, in sending for materials and tailor from the town to furnish the lady with a riding-dress.

Whilst waiting for this, the days were filled up with lively talk, reading, and music. The evenings, however, were devoted only to one amusement—namely, card-playing, which, strange enough, neither of the gentlemen, although perfectly polite cavaliers, declined, out of consideration to their hostess. It is true that, twice, Von Walden endeavoured to persuade Marie Louise, in joke, to take a hand at their game, but, as he expected, she had declined. She, however, like a good wife, took her work, and placed herself at her husband's side, which was rather more than he either wished or expected. This custom had the effect of preventing their play from extending beyond the time usually observed in society; and when the gentlemen showed any inclination to lengthen it out longer, Marie Louise would say, with engaging playfulness, "Gentlemen, you forget that I am only a spectator, and that a spectator has the failing of becoming weary."

In the meantime, the riding-habit was prepared, and on the first occasion that Marie Louise appeared in it, Von Walden could not abstain from admiring the figure and grace of his wife, which he thought he had never seen to such advantage before. The major and captain disputed for the honour of holding her stirrup, but were set aside by the jealous anxiety of the husband, who himself lifted his wife into her saddle. This did not escape the attention of Marie Louise. It pleased her more than anything she had seen in her husband. The ride was pleasant. She was teachable, attentive, and pleased; and all returned home in high spirits.

Every day was this pleasure renewed, and soon it became so favourite a diversion with Marie Louise, that she was vexed when the sky threatened rain. The pleasure soon became a passion, and she would even ride out alone, when, in despair at her absence, the gentlemen would sit down at cards in broad daylight, to shorten the time, which, however, disappeared as regularly on her return.

"My good Walden," said Marie Louise, one evening when she was alone with her husband, and with more than usual kindness in her tone, "I have remarked that you are unlucky at cards, and although the stakes are not high, yet, altogether, you must be a considerable loser."

"Which I make amends for on other evenings."

"That has happened very seldom. If you will only do me a pleasure, a real pleasure, you will not so constantly make cards your evening's amusement; not only for the cause I have mentioned, but because it is so *ennuying* for me to have to sit by the whole evening gaping over my work."

"Have you not brought this *ennui* upon yourself, my dear? Why should we not pay some visits to our neighbours, and invite them in return? Then you would have some change in your amusements, and you would have a circle to preside over, as becomes a lady of your rank and beauty."

"I am sorry that you should not only evade my remarks, but the few attentions that I require from you."

"Now, my angel, you cannot well complain of our guests, who are ready to lie down in the dust at your feet! But when one has been paying attentions the whole day——"

"One must dispense with them when the hour for card-playing comes, do you mean? But, my good Walden, in this we think very differently, and I will therefore, with all the frankness and openness that we agreed on at the beginning of our engagement, confess to you that I shall be seriously angry, if, now that I have requested it, you do not put some restraint on yourself, and diminish this practice, which I cannot think right when it becomes such a constant habit."

"You ought not to say this, Marie Louise; a wife ought to think——"

"That she is her husband's best friend, and that he ought to listen to her advice, when it proceeds from good motives," said she, interrupting her husband good-humouredly.

"Well, well, that is not my opinion; but as you have adopted it, then——the card-table shall not make its appearance to-morrow!"

"Oh, you are a perfect model of an amiable husband!"

And Von Walden was pleased to surrender his marital authority to one of those fascinating smiles from his beautiful wife, which were all the more dangerous from being so rare. "But," thought he; "it is quite time now to put an end to the retirement of the honeymoon; it has lasted already five weeks—which is one week too long."

CHAPTER XVII.

I will no more on tip-toe stand;
As God has given me eyes,
So will I with them see.
VON BRAUN.

ON the day after this conversation, the master and mistress of Malcolm's-Ness paid their first visit.

Marie Louise's toilette was calculated to elicit great admiration. Her appearance, which, when she chose, had the most distinguished elegance and the most refined grace, produced great effect on this her first brilliant display. What was the applause of the little townspeople compared to this aristocratic society? The admiration that she gained was, however, the least part of her satisfaction; for even more flattering was the marked politeness and kindness with which she was everywhere received. Marie Louise felt herself happy, for her vanity had gained a triumph which contented her.

On their return, having exhausted their remarks on the little events of the day, the gentlemen, as if attracted by an invisible power, began to hover round the beloved card-tables, which no officious servant came to arrange; for the mistress of the house had said to Landstedt, the butler, as he was about to perform his accustomed office, "We shall not play this evening."

To make amends, Marie Louise exerted her whole amount of conversational talent. The major and the captain listened with due politeness, and contributed their part in the conversation, although, as usual, only half awake, but Von Walden appeared quite inanimate and depressed.

Now that he had again begun to indulge in his most favourite amusement, or rather his only passion, it was quite impossible to limit it; especially as the thought occurred to him, how contemptible it was to follow the dictates of a wife. Was he not a man—had he not been long enough a slave? What would his two friends think of it? What would Marie Louise herself fancy when she saw that her power could be established so quickly and so easily, and without resistance? Without doubt, nothing less than that, as he had shown himself to be a *cipher,* she must perform the part of the *figure* through which the *cipher* represented a *number.* But this was not to be borne. Every manly feeling rose up against so much weakness. And yet it was not easy to brave Marie Louise so openly, as in his presence, and in consequence of his permission, she had told the servant that the table would not be wanted.

Von Walden was on the whole of a tolerably passive nature, but when his blood once began to ferment it ran rather quicker than he wished. A whole hour he struggled against the temptation; but as this temptation assailed him in the form of card-playing it was not to be overcome.

It was quite unknown to Marie Louise that the greater part of his debts had been occasioned by this dangerous passion, and even Von Walden himself was not aware how many promissory notes he had given during his nights of play. Many, he thought, could be paid without hesitation, many could wait, and many of considerable amount he had entirely forgotten, having been obliged during his long courtship to confine himself to the moderate card-playing of the little town. Even here at home in his own house, he was obliged to satisfy himself with low stakes, but still they were good players with whom he played, and were as eager and as excited over their game as himself.

It struck eight o'clock. What, in the name of Heaven, should they do with themselves until eleven, the hour when they were accustomed to retire for the night?

Marie Louise endeavoured to draw Von Walden into conversation. Never had she been more friendly in her manner to him—but all was in vain! Perhaps he saw in it only a proof, that she herself suspected that she had carried her power too far. In short: Von Walden, after for a few minutes walking restlessly up and down the room, succeeded in quieting the rebellious feeling which forbade him to offend his wife in this manner. He rang, and ordered the servant, with a sharp voice, to set out the card-table. At the moment this command issued from his lips, a deep blush overspread Marie Louise's face. The proud wife, for the first time, set at defiance by the person whom she had made her husband, and whom she had invested with such unlimited power, stood up and approached Von Walden with a manner so quiet and gracious, that he was at a loss to account for it. "Now then," said she, with cheerful naïveté, as she gave him a slight blow with her handkerchief, "you have lost the wager, and I shall have great pleasure in wearing my new shawl—I was sure that you could not do without your card-table."

"Nothing could turn out better," thought Von Walden; and in the best possible humour at this turn given to the affair, he kissed his wife's hand with delight, and exclaimed: "Two shawls, my goddess, is the very least fine you can demand. Is not that right, gentlemen, when one loses a wager to such a charming wife as mine?"

Both gentlemen had very naturally suitable answers in readiness, but neither of them believed the story of the wager. On the contrary, they suspected the truth, and appreciated the delicacy and penetration of their young hostess so highly, that they would have condemned Von Walden for calling out these qualities in such a manner—had not their own passion for play enlisted them on his side.

Marie Louise took up her work, and placed herself as usual by the side of her husband. Once or twice Von Walden endeavoured to persuade her to go to rest, as the day's visit had fatigued her, but she declined, and the play ended at the usual time.

* * * * * *

"Does my lady want anything more?" asked the lady's maid.

"Nothing, Hannah."

The maid shut the bed-room door and left her mistress alone.

Marie Louise had thrown a shawl over her dressing-gown, and sat before the glimmering fire. She was busy unbraiding her beautiful hair, whilst Von Walden, quite subdued at the thought of his first curtain lecture, which was evidently approaching, walked slowly up and down the room.

But minute after minute passed. The tresses were all unbraided, and yet no beginning was made.

"What is she waiting for, then?" thought he; "perhaps for sighs and tears, and fallings on my knees and repentance—but nothing of that sort will she get, I can tell her! I may as well then break the ice myself——"

"Don't you feel quite well, dear Marie Louise?"

"Perfectly well."

"You are so silent, my angel?"

"I was thinking about something."

"About what? About your new shawls?" said he, wantonly joking over the improvised wager.

Marie Louise answered nothing.

"And about something else—our visit of to-day, perhaps? Yes, how formal everything is at old Lindholm; the old countess has advanced so little with the times, that she fancies a coronet is all that is needed to cover all deficiencies of her old house. But still she is a worthy well-bred old woman, whose presence inspires too much reverence for you young women to venture on all the display of coquetry in her presence that you are accustomed to."

Marie Louise still preserved silence.

"But at Kronby we shall certainly have a very pleasant party. The baroness is decidedly the prettiest woman we have in the neighbourhood—of course, excepting the little mistress of Malcolm's-Ness."

Continued silence.

"Come now, my treasure, this is rather too interesting! Better let the storm burst than to be constantly threatening with dark clouds! I have heard that matrimonial blessedness has certain privileges connected with it, which are known under the name of curtain lectures, and I, poor wretch, must, I suppose, subject myself to the old law. Let the process, then, be as short as possible!" Von Walden took a chair, and sat down by the side of his wife.

"You might have spared yourself this joke, as you have perhaps seen yourself that it is out of place. I have no intention of requiring your attention to anything I have to say."

"Really, my little charmer, you will not be angry?"

"Angry!"

"Well, offended; displeased, if you will—in a word, you have perhaps cause enough, in seeing that a promise which you exacted from me yesterday was not to be depended upon."

"Yes, that I perceive."

"And in your capacity of angel—you know I am so fond of assigning this name to you—you are not angry?"

"In the capacity of an angel, in case I were one, I ought, perhaps, in seeing my inability to influence you, to weep. In the capacity of a woman, I am silent."

"And why so; wherefore be silent? I should like to know what grounds you can have for not saying something?"

"Words spoken in earnest," replied Marie Louise, "ought never to be thrown away in vain. What I have said, was said in vain."

"Yes; but my dearest creature, you ought not to consider me quite lost, because I was bold enough for once to have my own way. Down in the drawing-room, coquetting with your pretended wager, you were so charming—why should you now look so gloomy about it?"

"Smiles and feigned words, one has for strangers; for one's husband——"

"One has looks of displeasure and unfriendly words?"

"No, not that—but one does not dissemble. And now we will consider that enough has been said about the matter."

"With the greatest pleasure, my dear Marie Louise—I have no other wish! But as you are so, so—how shall I say?—so totally different from what I had expected (Walden seized his wife's hand, and kissed it respectfully), I beg your pardon from my very heart. I see for the first time what the command you have over yourself must cost you."

"Since you say that, I will also confess that this effort to command myself almost exceeded my powers, and I should be very unhappy were you often to put me to such a trial."

"Ah, Marie Louse, my adored one! I am not worthy of thy goodness and forbearance!" And in a transport of repentance, and seized with momentary rapture, that she who could have said so much, had said so little, the husband threw himself at the feet of his wife. Marie Louise smiled: a sweet, good-humoured, and yet troubled smile. Never had the married pair so firmly resolved as now to live for their duties and for each other; indeed, it was perhaps the first time that a true and earnest feeling had been awakened in Walden's frivolous mind.

Unfortunately all his impressions were of the most fugitive and transitory nature. It belonged to the present, however, to produce a most wonderful effect. On the following evening, Marie Louise thought of nothing less than a surprise, but she received one when Von Walden, as Landstedt prepared, as usual, to arrange the card-table, said rather loudly, and as if the words required an effort: "No card-playing this evening!"

In the first quarter of an hour after the great surprise, Marie Louise's beautiful and speaking looks were a sufficient reward, but ere half an hour had elapsed, he began to repent of having carried out his generosity to such lengths. The satisfaction which he had had all day in the anticipation of Marie Louise's extraordinary astonishment, was now dissipated and gone; and his mind was soon possessed with a dark suggestion of how becoming and noble it would be, if Marie Louise on her side were to give a contrary command; it would be such an angelic action! But Marie Louise gave no such command, although, to tell the truth, she understood perfectly well her husband's wish; such a measure did not suit her character. "Hem, hem!" thought Von Walden, as he saw that his wish was not going to be fulfilled; "this is all very well for once."

On the following evening the card-table was again in use.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOON was another kind of life and other doings in Malcolm's-Ness. Guests came and went. Invitations were given and received. The family at Segerstad had returned, and the ladies were constantly together.

The Baroness Charlotte, who had previously never had a taste for riding, would now accompany Marie Louise; and followed by the young cavaliers, whom the spring brought out to the country houses, especially to Segerstad, the ladies made long excursions, and it became the fashion to arrange little riding parties, to visit many points in the surrounding district, which had not hitherto excited attention, but which had now become suddenly interesting.

In this whirl of pleasure and dissipation, in which nothing was spared that could make time fly quickly, Marie Louise became less harassed by her inward reflections and feelings. She felt them still now and for ever, for her heart was not capable of having nourished them without preserving them for ever, but the healing remedy was not nauseous.

One day the company, with Marie Louise and the Baroness Charlotte at their head, engrossed by a lively conversation, had quite forgotten how far they had proceeded, when the baroness exclaimed,—

"What is that?—we have rode as far as Guillingen!"

"Do not be alarmed, ladies," said Von Walden; "this wood looks so venerable, we can cool ourselves a little under its shade. How picturesque is the sun shining through the branches of the trees!"

"I hear voices out there. What do you think, Madame von Walden, can wood nymphs have enticed us into the gloomy shade?" asked the major of his young hostess, who, silent and in deep thought, was looking up a footpath.

"No; on my honour, they are only two woodsmen. But, ha! what is that?"

The major drew up his horse, at the same moment with Marie Louise,—"You are frightened, I fear, my dear lady?"

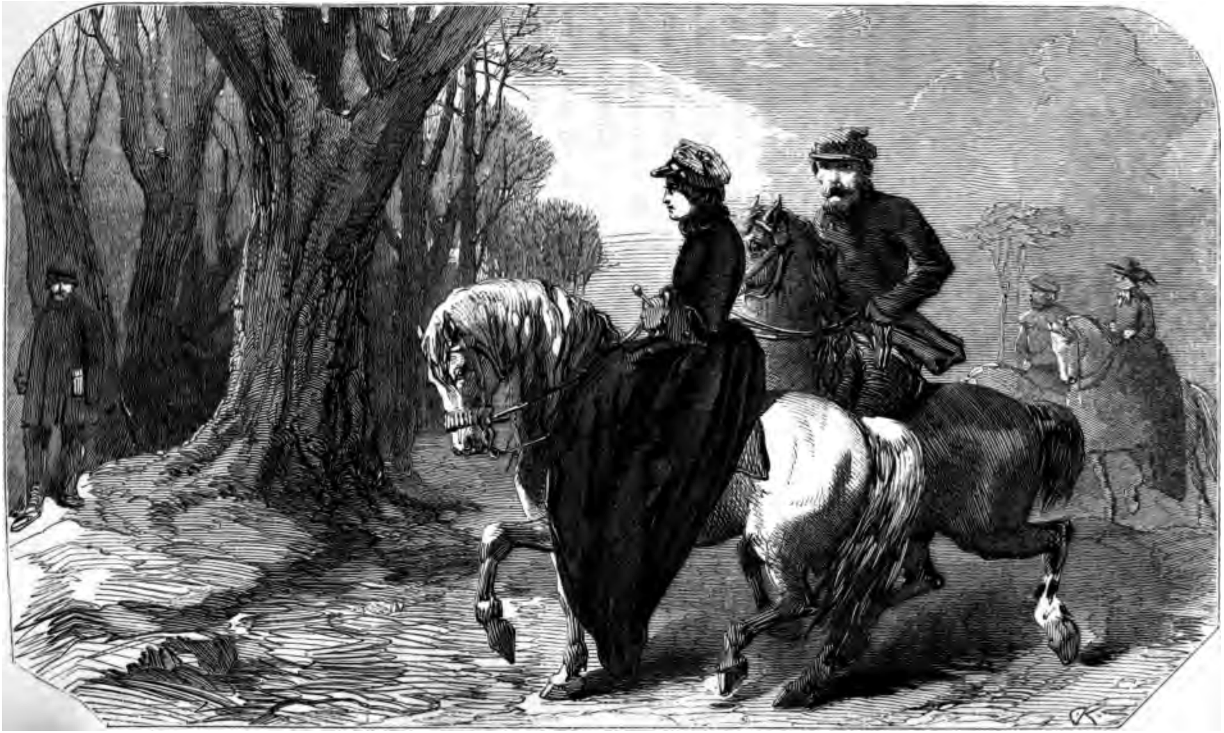
"Frightened? No, not at all!" rejoined Marie Louise, whilst her cheeks assumed an unusual depth of colour. Scarcely could she sit still in her saddle, so startled was she to her inmost soul by the voice which reached her ear.

The polite guest looked as if he were about to make another remark, but Marie Louise, seized by fear lest her emotion should be observed by the rest of the company, stammered out in a tone which sounded almost like a request: "It is only the heat, major—pay no attention to such a trifle." It was fortunate for Marie Louise that the attention of the Baroness Charlotte was directed another way; meanwhile she could scarcely master her uneasiness, since every instant she expected and dreaded to see the speaker.

She had not long to wait.

Two men, an old peasant and a young and handsome gentleman, in a light hunting jacket and round straw hat on his head, came out from the wood-path on to the road.

"Ah, your obedient servant, Mr. Engineer Williamson," cried Von Walden, with a loud voice. The husband was anxious to convince the baroness, and those of the company who might be acquainted with the past history of Marie Louise, that he was far from feeling either jealous or suspicious of the influence that his former rival might have, and he rejoiced, on the contrary, that he had an opportunity of showing off to him his wife and his happiness.



THE MEETING IN THE WOOD.

"Your most obedient servant. This is a most agreeable rencontre; is it not, my dear Marie Louise?"

"Extremely agreeable," said she, catching at the first phrase that came to her lips.

Williamson, meantime, greeted the company right and left, and stepping up to her horse, with a self-possession that restored her own speech and courage, and whilst he patted the animal's neck, said cheerfully, but in a perfectly well-measured tone: "I almost fancy I see Diana herself, with her followers; but it would not have given me greater pleasure to meet the goddess herself in *propria persona.* It is quite unnecessary to ask after the health of Madame von Walden, seeing how well she looks."

"One can see, too," rejoined Von Walden, "how polite the gentlemen from the town are. I ought not to agree with you; but as we are not long out of our honeymoon, I may venture to say that I also think the air of the country has greatly embellished my wife."

Williamson did not gratify Von Walden by appearing to notice this affectation of frankness. "I am detaining the ladies I fear," said he, and prepared to make his retreat.

"We are not in such a hurry," answered Marie Louise, who began to feel that her silence towards an old acquaintance would appear strange. "I must have the honour of introducing to Engineer Williamson a friend, of whom I have so often spoken to him."

A deep bow on Williamson's side, followed by a few off-hand words of politeness, was returned by a most gracious inclination of the Baroness Charlotte's beautiful head. She had never imagined that this long-disliked Engineer Williamson was so good looking, or that in the quality of a former lover of Marie Louise he would have shown so much tact and good breeding.

"Give us your company to Malcolm's-Ness," said Von Walden, in the tone of the frankest hospitality. The idea of showing off his whole power in his own home to the engineer charmed his frivolous mind. Blushing deeply, Marie Louise, saw herself obliged, in the presence of by-standers, to unite her entreaties to those of her husband.

Williamson declared that to his great regret he was unable to avail himself of their kindness. "Pressing business," &c.

"Oh, there is not always that in the way. We are neighbours, too, as long as the engineer has business in Guillingen. If we cannot have the pleasure of your company to-day, we will hope for it another time. Let me see: Thursday, Friday, or—Sunday? On that day the whole of the working world is free."

At this silly allusion, Williamson's colour changed, and he said: "Well then, let Sunday, which for us workmen is a day of rest, be also for me a double festival, if it so please you." He raised his straw hat from off the fine hair that waved over his sun-burned brows, and bidding adieu to the company, disappeared down the wood path, which led in a contrary direction to the high road.

"An old acquaintance, I perceive," said the major, who had been remarking Marie Louise the whole time, and now seized the bridle of her horse, which, as absent in mind as its young mistress, seemed disposed to botanize in the wood.

Marie Louise did not hear the words, but the tone falling on her ear had sufficient power to restore her presence of mind. With eagerness she entered into conversation, and one subject after the other wasdi scussed so fluently, that the Baroness Charlotte never once perceived any want of clearness in the current of her thoughts. But when, in the evening, the guests had departed, and the host, with his two friends, wished for yet another quarter of an hour to try the newly-purchased billiard-table, she found herself alone, and clearness of thought was gone. All that had seemed agreeable and entertaining in the previous week, now appeared to her empty and wearisome; and the unbecoming tone of levity in her husband's conversation made her blush, in spite of her former assertion, that "such a man could never cause a wife to blush." Alas! when she compared the manner of the two on this occasion, how infinitely superior seemed Williamson, her former lover, to him whom she had chosen as her husband. At this moment, the burthen of her wedded yoke fell with the weight of lead upon her consciousness. Her heart burned and trembled, and there was with her an outburst of passionate delirium, such as she had described to her mother; and quite forgetting the words of that tender mother:—"When you have once formed this engagement, which is to last for life, remember that never is a feeling to be untrue to him to whom you have given all"—she gave herself wholly up to the wildness of her grief, and forgot at the same time that her husband might each moment enter.

Both fortunately and unfortunately this did not happen. The quarter of an hour had grown into an hour, and this into hours, when Marie Louise, awakened from her troubled dream, arose from her sofa, and perceived the lights burned down in the sockets. At once was all clear to her. In trembling fear she cast a glance on the white curtains; she fancied that Von Walden must have laid down some time, after perceiving her condition, and leaving her, in just anger, to the stupefaction which followed the powerful excitement of her blood; but with a relieved heart, she found that he was not in the room, and now came the moment for blushing at herself: that the disorder in her husband's habits should afford a screen to her own dereliction from duty, and be looked upon by her with thankfulness.

She looked at her watch. It was past two. Marie Louise began to undress herself hastily, but seized by another idea, she stopped; lighted fresh candles, took a book to pretend to read, and sat down at her table to await her husband.

Scarcely had she begun to play this new part, when the door opened softly, and Von Walden entered with a somewhat uncertain gait, and in a condition in which Marie Louise had never yet seen him, and which she had never expected to see. To celebrate the arrival of the new billiard-table, the enjoyment of their game had been increased by a hastily arranged carouse. Occasional glasses, between snatches of jest and song, had been followed by deeper libations. Want of luck in play had increased Von Walden's irritability. The means for deadening his feelings of vexation stood near at hand; and the result was, that he was at length reduced to the most degrading condition in which a man can be seen.

Marie Louise shrank back in horror from his caresses. She could scarcely look at him, so contemptible did he appear to her.

"What, you have been sitting up and waiting for me, my little turtle-dove! and been sighing and weeping, I have no doubt. But what is the matter? I am rather merry, to be sure; but it is not worth while to sit there crying about it."

"I think so, too," said Marie Louise, who, feeling it was not the right moment for preaching reason, forced herself to a cheerful answer; but her heart beat violently, and her anger was with difficulty kept under control, in spite of her words.

"So! you think so, too? Well, that is right! Then, do you know, my goddess, what I am thinking of?"

"No. What then?" and Marie Louise looked uneasily around her.

"Well, nothing more nor less than that I shall begin to live every day as I like best; for, between ourselves, nothing is a more cursed and stupid restraint than when one is obliged to thwart one's inclinations! But why do you keep looking at the wall? Look at me!—There, that is right! Now look kindly at me, and kiss me, my little dove!"

"No, by Heavens! This is not to be borne!" and Marie Louise arose hastily, to take refuge in her dressing-room.

"Oh, your obedient servant, madame; no such manœuvre, I beg! For the sake of appearances in company, and in the presence of a discarded lover, one is allowed to make love a little; but when *tête-à-tête* with one's wife, the deuce take me if one gets proper respect."

The proud Marie Louise nearly sank beneath the weight of this moment's shame and grief.

* * * * *

On the morning after this night, when Marie Louise had suffered from so many different causes of anguish, she drove early to Segerstad. Her heart required the sympathy of another. She was ashamed; she trembled at the thought of confiding in her mother; besides this, it was twelve miles from the town. Segerstad lay nearer, and the baroness should be told, not all, but, at all events, enough to be able to assist her with her experience.

The baroness, who soon perceived that the early visit had more in it than a mere morning ride, led her friend to a pavilion in the garden, where they could talk undisturbed.

"Now, dearest Marie Louise, I see that something has disturbed you, although I know not what. With the exception of the first scene, in which you were rather at a loss, I must congratulate you on the manner in which you played your part yesterday in our drama in the wood."

"Afterwards, however," said Marie Louise, "fate assigned me another part to play. It is, perhaps, a weakness that I should tell you, for I am almost ashamed at not being able to bear alone my vexations; but your advice may be of use to me."

"How, then? Surely not about the part you are to play on Sunday? As for that, you are the best judge of what is right. But whatever it may be about, only speak quickly; your solemnity quite makes me inquisitive."

Marie Louise related then the latter part of her night adventure. Her painfully and deeply wounded feelings did not spare Von Walden. The baroness could see very plainly how he had exhibited himself in the capacity of a gallant husband as well as that of an offended tyrant. But instead of breaking out into exclamations of surprise and contempt, she answered, laughing: "Good heavens, my dear friend, how fortunate you are,—you are really quite enviable."

"You are joking rather out of season, it seems to me," replied Marie Louise, half offended.

"I am not joking in the least! A wife who has been married three full months without seeing the wine-leaved crown of Bacchus on her husband's brow, is indeed to be envied, and I advise you, both now and in future, as your best friend, to behave as if your memory did not extend from night till morning. Look you, my dearest Marie Louise, we women must sleep as sound as rocks, if our instinct tells us, at the first turning of the key in the lock, that we cannot keep awake without being in danger of taking offence. Sleep, sleep, dear child, and thank Heaven that you are not obliged to sleep by day as well as by night—believe me, many wives are forced to do that."

"But," rejoined Marie Louise, who, against her will, was amused, and unable to refuse a smile at her friend's grounds of consolation—"but, dearest Charlotte, only think if play should be the cause of these orgies!"

"In that case," continued the baroness, thoughtfully, "one can scarcely say that a wife does enough when she only sleeps; for in case of need, she should even pretend to be stone dead."

"Why so?"

"Because the stone dead can neither speak nor give answers, and because words even from the lips of a seraph are still words; that is, little nothings, which are drawn from us in a moment of irritability by him who can give what colouring to them he pleases."

"Well, then, I understand," said Marie Louise, "and I will endeavour to sleep."

"But sleep gracefully, my love! Remember that this state of stupefaction must not hang over your eyes the next morning, for then the tender husband will ask why your eyes appear so heavy; and this question must be spared him, if you would not have to pretend to be actually dead."

The two ladies parted. And Von Walden, who was not awake when his wife had left home, but was now dressed, and advanced to meet her somewhat composed, was quite startled at Marie Louise's serious but perfectly pleasant and kind manner, which bore no trace of a remembrance of the night scene.

"Bless my soul, she is a perfect angel," said he to himself; "and such a wife deserves that one should respect her. This friendly look this morning is worth a thousand curtain lectures."

As a grand thankoffering, the card-table was not brought out that evening, and as to the key of the billiard-room, Von Walden had lost it.

"Really," thought Marie Louise, "Charlotte is a wise woman; may the expedient always succeed!"

CHAPTER XIX.

LETTER OF ENGINEER WILLIAMSON TO A FRIEND.

"NOTHING but Jeremiads over my laziness! If, however, you knew the state of the case you would thank God that you only now and then get a scantily-filled page from me.

As the love affairs which my former epistles informed you of are now over, I can write more openly and confidentially, since your eye alone will see these lines. But the time of "sketches" is over; you must content yourself with very scanty fare, if you expect me to provide for your entertainment.

Our little town is an excellent town, a super-excellent town in one respect—viz., that one is seldom likely to catch colds or sore throats here. We live, you must know, in so warm an atmosphere, that the streets between one neighbour's house and another are quite lukewarm. And from whence do you imagine that this beneficial warmth proceeds, which thus sends its rays through the whole town, and sets our blood in such circulation, that in the midst of winter we could fancy ourselves in summer? Well, then, this fire escapes from the rosy lips and glowing tongues of our ladies.

You have never lived in so small a town, and have perhaps no idea of a *haute volée*, extending from the burgomaster down to the modest huckster behind his counter, which is joined in one grand conspiracy against the *haute volée* which happens to have chosen its residence outside the town; and as you do not know what it is like, I must tell you, my friend, that it is rather dangerous to fall between these two parties. At a few miles distance from the town lie several gentlemen's seats, belonging to the old as well as the new aristocracy. They have, very naturally, their own refined and fashionable society, and visit the town perhaps not more than twice a year. The town, on the other hand, has its very piquant and agreeable society, that made attempts formerly to unite with that of the country; rejected, however, by this latter, it, in its turn, rides the high horse, and woe to the unhappy member of the greater *haute volée* who by chance has fallen into the net of the little one. It will as inevitably be swallowed up as the fly in the spider's-web.

Farther, you must know that we have also great people amongst us, and before rising from a jovial dinner-table, we drink to the prosperity of "trade and navigation!" Here you may see, for example, a merchant who looks upon the purchase of twenty hundred-weight of Dutch cheese as an affair of as great importance, and requiring the same penetration, as Rothschild when negotiating a loan of millions; there a son of Mercury, who, in silence, is praying to Heaven that the funds may fall, since in two or three posts he will have to honour bills to the amount of £133, which he has not yet been able to get together; there is a third, who tells you of his large transactions with England, because he has lately had smuggled over for him a dozen crockery-ware plates and as many tea-cups; and lastly a respectable retail dealer, who has given a northern house of business an order for four dozen Jomfraland mackarel.

Now confess yourself, dearest friend, if the commercial affairs of our town do not inspire you with as much respect as those of the East India Company itself.

Now that you are a little acquainted with our locality, I must inform you that as long as the boundary between the two different parties was not encroached upon, all went on very well. Now, however, has the war-trumpet sounded a frightful alarm—that is, in the town.

You are aware that a young lady of the name of N—— (with me she once had another name that I would now fain forget) married, some months ago, the Lieutenant von Walden, who is distantly related to our learned burgomaster. Before her betrothal, as you are aware, she inherited a very considerable and beautiful estate, on which stands a handsome residence, in the middle of the district occupied by the country *haute volée.* Madame von Walden, who was formerly acquainted with the fashionable society of the Baroness G—— of Segerstad, and being herself of a good family, was very naturally received with open arms; and when she had been married about a fortnight, she persuaded her husband to take leave of all the almost daily festivities in the town, to go out to Malcolm's-Ness, her estate, although at that time it had lost its principal attraction, in the absence of their most distinguished neighbours, who had gone to the capital.

So much ingratitude and indifference the town had not expected of the young pair, who did not even invite the burgomaster uncle to visit them in Malcolm's-Ness. Some said—"Formerly, when the young lady lived in the humble bow-windowed room, and had nothing better to make herself smart in but a starched calico dress, we received her as if she had been our equal. No one was so little as to let her feel their superiority and her own insignificance—no, thank Heaven! that we were not."

"And we," said others, "who have thrown away an enormous sum on a dinner for the newly married couple, what have we got for it? Not even an invitation in return." "And we, too," complained a third set, "we gave the most brilliant balls, and expensive suppers, and got scarcely a call in return for our trouble. Oh, it is a scandal to treat thus her oldest and perhaps, after all, her most respectable acquaintances!"

Yet, what was all this? The mere humming of flies compared to the buzzing of a cockchafer, when we consider the anger of the burgomaster.

He, the grandee of the town, to be *cut* by a relation, nay, more, by a man who owed all his good fortune to himself; since, you must know, that if the burgomaster had not, "in the name of humanity," as Pellander would say, allowed a writ to lie in his desk instead of having it served, Von Walden would at this moment have been philosophizing in prison, and would have had no opportunity of playing the proud gentleman at "Rudolph Castle," as they say he wishes to have Malcolm's-Ness rechristened.

But as I have now told you all, my friend, you will perhaps ask why I have troubled my brain, and soiled a sheet of paper, with the relation of things that concern me in no sort of way, and interest you perhaps still less. Most certainly this proceeds from our endeavouring, whilst under the influence of an unhappy passion, to search after everything that can turn our attention from the pain of the inward wound, to which we afterwards become sensible again in spite of all our attempts to heal it.

Long enough has my heart been silent and closed to the friend of my youth: now shall you look into it. Now do I feel strong enough for such a revelation.

When Marie Louise, this ever adored woman, refused my proposal, it arose not from any want of love, but from a much more unfortunate want: I mean, the want of a pure heart. The breath of an evil spirit had wafted over her bright soul, and had sullied it with the sin of pride. My situation in life was too humble, my name too plebeian. Time brought a change. She became rich; but she soon began to perceive that riches do not secure happiness. I am not deceiving myself, when I tell you that her former love, now that she could anticipate a life with me free from all care, arose to a greater height than it would have done under any other circumstances. Yet, deeply and irrevocably as I loved, I was determined to show Marie Louise that she who would not share a humble lot with me, could never make me happy through her wealth. The fire of my love flamed up as high as hers, and her torments were also mine; but I succeeded in preserving my show of coldness, and each time that I was about to yield to the temptation to reveal my secret, the past stood up as a warning before me. Only in affluence, only when free from care, can Marie Louise love. A woman who does not prefer a moderate income, nay, even poverty, with the man her heart has chosen, to the most dazzling position in life, —she who, in her earliest spring time, has not felt this, has never truly loved. The time for calculation comes soon enough. Marie Louise was too young to know it, and yet she calculated.

I know not what desperate resolution led her to hastily decide her fate; and let me add that I am also unaware how long I should have managed to struggle against her and my own united feelings, if her choice of another had not ended at once the doubt and hesitation that she, at times, in spite of my better reason, forced me into.

I knew that Von Walden was a fortune-hunter, and a man without character. I had proofs against him; and to snatch Marie Louise from an abyss, I laid them before her. Alas! this was the first time that I had an opportunity of fully admiring this at the same time little and high-minded woman, who, the moment she had pledged her faith with a man, made his honour and his interests her own. You should have heard with what assurance her lips, until then unacquainted with falsehood, boldly endeavoured to convince me that she knew all that she required to know concerning him, and that she would not know anything more!

Oh, Marie Louise! Marie Louise—for ever lost to me! My friend, forgive these laments. She was a woman who deserved to be mourned for, and the sorrow her loss has inspired will last for ever.

Since her marriage I have seen her only once: it was at the moment when, in the enjoyment of the triumph of her vanity, and whilst in a morning ride, she set the whole town in astonishment at the splendour of her dress and equipage. Ah, poor Marie Louise! how long will these gewgaws be able to fill up the void in thy heart?

Shortly after she removed with her husband to Malcolm's-Ness. Then the darkest night reigned in my heart. I am ashamed to confess that my weakness and depression made me almost forget myself. But all things have their time for developing themselves, even sorrow. Let us combat against it ever so much, it will master us. It has mastered me.

I will pass on quickly in my narration. A man may feel the pangs of love, but he must not describe them, for then he becomes womanish, and you know whether I would willingly become that.

Months passed on. I began to raise my head again, and in active and varied employment found the spring of a new life. God be thanked that labour is to me not only a pleasure, but a want; nay, more even than a want—it is to me everything. Can you believe, my friend, that I have acquired, too, another passion, formerly unknown to me? I am become avaricious. I have resolved, through activity and steadiness, and what good qualities I may possess, to become a respected member of society, but also I will become rich, in order to prove to Marie Louise that the lot that I offered her did not after all deserve to be rejected with such contempt. Now and then I surprise myself in dreams, which it is perhaps not right to indulge in, but which spur me on with restless eagerness to reach my goal.

I write this at Guillingen, a very agreeable farm-house, where I have for the present taken up my residence. Guillingen lies not very far from Malcolm's-Ness, but for me the road would be always too long, since I should never use it.

My letter shall remain until the next post day, as I am now interrupted by my host, who wishes me to go out with him, to see a swamp in the wood.

* * * * * *

I have seen her again!—her! I have seen Marie Louise again!

Surrounded by company, belonging to the circle of which I spoke at the beginning of this letter, she was riding on horseback, as I met her. You can little imagine what I felt, as I saw her so beautiful—more beautiful than I had ever seen her before—and yet so confused! I know not how it was that I contrived to summon courage and boldness to speak to her in a style that suited at once her present circumstances, and the familiarity of an old acquaintance. I think that I succeeded, and I rejoice in the belief that my self-possession helped her to recover hers.

He, Von Walden, who has plucked my sweet and beauteous flower—and it is much to be able to endure this man, and to show him the common politeness which educated people observe one to another—he, invited me to Malcolm's-Ness; it is true, in a somewhat haughty and stupid manner, but still with an obstinacy that would admit of no refusal. On Sunday, only think, on Sunday, I shall see Marie Louise in her own house as a wife and mistress!

Sunday night.—I cannot, I ought not to write this evening! My reason lies again prostrate beneath the mighty storm of passion. Strange conflicts, which are foreign to my mind and heart, begin to perplex my soul, and becloud my understanding.

What does all this mean! Did I not love before—had I not already an idea, a great and clear idea, of the power of love? I must smile, in pity at myself must smile. The bandage has fallen from my eyes. I was happy so long as I only loved, now am I unhappy, frantic, lost—because I more than love, because I burn with torments that rise up like flames out of an abyss before me.

How could this woman, who loves me, me alone, how could she dare before my eyes to permit the caresses of the man she must abhor? How could she smile and assume such a look of resigned tenderness, as she replied to his *fade* compliments? How came those glances, that seemed flashing from her, to fall alone on me, kindling within me a fire that nothing can extinguish? knew she nothing of this? no; she knew it not—since, trembling and panting like a convicted criminal, her eyes sought immediately another object, and her lips moved quickly and tremulously as she spoke of indifferent subjects.

This man is not to be endured! He cannot live without play; even this evening must he have recourse to this diversion. I excused myself.

Marie Louise walked up and down. There were only a few gentlemen there. With me she spoke little, but what she said was spoken with a familiarity that bewildered me. She spoke more with the others. Von Walden had the whole evening decided ill-luck. His temper began evidently to suffer from it, and after two or three imploring looks which Marie Louise, unperceived by the rest, but not by me, cast at him, across the table, his irritability seemed to have reached its climax. At half-past nine the supper was announced. "Is it not half an hour too soon, my dear?" asked he, with a look at his wife, for which I would have willingly boxed his ears. "We have guests, who may be wishing to leave," answered she, quietly.

It must be the custom of the house that supper should end the card-playing; since, in a very determined tone of voice, Von Walden said, "We will not end the game now, gentlemen! After supper, I shall see if I cannot take my revenge."

I saw Marie Louise blush deeply. And I saw her turn pale, as, on rising from the table, he said, with a sort of ironical playfulness: "Be so good as to take your places again, gentlemen. My wife, my little queen regent, has allowed a little relaxation in our household laws, and permits us to continue our amusement, although with the loss of her presence, since she dispenses favours and punishments at the same moment."

I took leave. I thought I observed that Marie Louise was scarcely able to support herself, as I approached; and I knew the proud woman so well. To have suffered before me this affront! I felt, in my own heart, how hers must be swelling. She bowed a silent leave-taking. The others were gone. From politeness, or from another cause, she followed me to the door, between the saloon and the ante-room.

We stood on each side of the threshold. In the ante-room was no one but myself. The projecting fire-place hid her from the card players. I seized her hand, and though my life were to pay for it, I could not have refrained from pressing it to my lips—as if, I know not how.

Marie Louise looked at me with a deep, impressive, strange sort of look—a look in which, for me, lay both heaven and hell. I thought I perceived the glistening of a tear, and I was not deceived. What must it have cost her not to have repressed it. On a sudden, however, resuming her mask, she drew back a step or two, greeted me with cold dignity, and vanished.

Do you believe that I returned home immediately? No; after I had ridden a considerable distance, I turned my horse and wandered down an avenue, and approached the house again; and there I perceived an object which was too holy to me, for me to venture to draw near to it at that moment.

Half concealed beneath the trees, and in the half darkness of a spring evening, Marie Louise was seated on a bench, leaning her head against the stem of a birch tree. Now was there no question of one starting tear; for, alas! they were gushing forth in an unrestrained stream. It was an outburst of the bitterest grief.

I stood only a few steps distant from her. But if I, at this moment, learnt to what a giant height passion can grow; yet had I still command over myself sufficiently to think of the danger I might do to her reputation. I flew, flew without looking behind me; but from a faint cry that reached my ear, I felt convinced that I was recognised.

Now you know all; and now you know, also, why I stand on the brink of an abyss.

Some days later.—Now all is right again! My blood is cooled, my mind is free—the evil is overcome; and who has saved me—who has saved us both? She. I know not how it has been with me this last week, but I have recovered myself again.

The day before yesterday the report was spread that the family at Malcolm's-Ness was about to take a long journey to the Springs, Baths, and I know not where. Heaven be praised! I am so happy in the thought that she has adopted this plan, rather than live in the neighbourhood of him whom her duty commands her to avoid.

Marie Louise was always an admirable woman. Now do I worship her with a love as pure as she deserves. I return once more to my duties, to my occupations, never again to tread the path of error, on which for a short time I madly rushed.

I ask myself: would you not have conquered at last,—from your own strength have conquered? It would be satisfactory to be convinced of this; but how have many such combats ended? Once, twice, many times, are such temptations overcome, but there comes a moment when we are without weapons. Far better is it to avoid the danger altogether.

I have purchased the plot of building-ground adjacent to the house of Counsellor Utter. There I shall next year commence the building of a house, from which I shall always have in sight the little tenement where she once lived, worked, and loved. How rich, and, at the same time, how poor, shall I be in my remembrances, as I dwell in this house, already dear to me, because there I shall be able to call up constantly to mind the shadow of her from behind the curtains!"

This letter, whose feigned cheerfulness at the beginning reflected Williamson's melancholy, and at whose conclusion he wished to depict a calmness which he did not possess, was never sent; for when his spirit was really quieted, and his soul had recovered its accustomed equilibrium, he tore it in pieces. What follies it contained! Had he really lost his reason? Should her name, that was dearer to him than all the world beside, be exposed in this manner? Should she, the wife of another, be represented during her struggles with a weakness that she was anxious to overcome? Should she be betrayed by him on whose account she struggled? No, that would have been a baseness! Marie Louise was worthy of a nobler feeling, than such as required the sympathy of others to give it vent. She suffered alone, and so also would he suffer.

In vain his friends at home awaited a longer letter. They received only short notes filled with excuses on account of pressing business, &c.

CHAPTER XX.

He drew himself upright,
And made his speech outright.
STJERNSTOLPE.

"AH, beloved, dearest child, when will thy mother see thee again?" asked Mrs. N——, as Marie Louise, with her husband had come into the town to pay her a parting visit, and now sat at the side of her oldest and dearest friend, in the well-known sitting-room.

"Indeed, that God alone knows, dear mamma, for Walden is determined, after our visit to the Baths, to make a tour abroad. It will be very entertaining to see a little of the world."

"Entertaining? I fear, my Marie Louise, it is not a desire for amusement that influences you."

Marie Louise blushed and was silent.

"Perhaps, my child, you have by chance seen him again who was once so dear to you?"

"Yes, mamma; and because it is so, and that I remember the words you spoke on the evening of my betrothal, will I go away from here. I would not oppose Walden, too, because I think it will be useful for him to remove from his old acquaintances."

"I know well what you mean, my child."

"Ah, mamma!" a deep sigh swelled Marie Louise's breast.

"I did not go to live with you," continued the mother, "not entirely from the reason I gave, but from the wish that you should both be closely thrown together. I feared that should I see what I did not approve of, I might not be able to preserve the silence that I ought, and that I might be too partial towards you; and such partiality shown towards one of a married couple may lead to incalculable mischief, especially in the early days of marriage. But although I have not seen my Marie Louise in her own house at Malcolm's-Ness, yet I have every reason to believe that she will prove a sensible wife. Yet I am uneasy at the report which says that Von Walden's unhappy propensity has begun to master him again—is it not so?"

"Yes, too certain."

"Well, then, my Marie Louise, I am far from thinking that this journey, from which you anticipate such favourable results, will afford him all the freedom he desires. He does not require his usual companions in order to indulge his desires."

"But still it will be a change, dear mamma. There will be ever new objects, and so much to see and hear."

"These novelties may amuse you, my child, and afford you entertainment and occupation, and in this manner become useful to you; but your husband, who has exhausted all these pleasures, may turn too easily away from them to his prevailing passion; and think what may be your situation when alone with a gamester husband in a strange place—perhaps in a foreign land? What frightful results might arise? I warn you. Travel, if it must be so, to the Baths, although, God knows, such places are dangerous enough, but let nothing in the world induce you to take a longer journey."

Marie sat reflecting, her head leaning on her hand; she saw that in several respects her mother was right, but here the old unconquerable obstinacy interfered, in spite of her own sound judgment. The journey had been decided on—it would be too great weakness to give it up merely on account of imaginary dangers.

"You do not think my advice good; you will not follow it?" said the mother, sorrowfully. "Ah, Marie Louise, I will neither now, nor ever, force you to a confession that you repent of not following it on another occasion; but I trust that, now you have the testimony of experience, you will seriously and carefully consider. It is the time no longer for hasty resolutions."

"Hasty, dear mamma? I assure you, mamma, I have never had reason to repent of any resolution I have taken."

"What, dearest child, are we become such strangers to one another, that you must, even before me, take shelter beneath your unfortunate pride? Has your mother deserved this of you?"

"But, mamma, I assure you—— "

"Well, well, my child; so much the better. In this case have you only the more to consider whether you should risk your well-being and domestic happiness in this way. I can assure you that it will not be increased by this journey."

"It is still my intention, however, mamma."

"Ever blind, ever obstinate! When will my Marie Louise come to her senses? I fear not before she has tasted all that life has most bitter."

"And what does mamma call the most bitter?"

"When we in extremity seek for help, and find none, but fall powerless into the abyss, which our repentance and our sorrow make still deeper."

"How frightfully you speak to-day, mamma! We will hope that it is not the voice of prophecy. But meanwhile, I am so deeply grieved to have pained you, mamma, that I do not know what I would not do to see you more cheerful again."

Marie kissed, tenderly, her mother's hand.

"I hear your husband's voice. He must not find us in so serious a conversation;" and Von Walden entered, humming a favourite tune.

"Well, dear mamma," said he, as he turned immediately to his mother-in-law, "has Marie Louise ended her confessions? Has she gone through the register of all my sins?"

"She has judged you too leniently, I think," answered Mrs. N——, in a tone which sounded more like earnest than jest.

"So much the better."

"So much the worse! A wife ought never to be blind."

"Oh, do not fear Marie Louise being blind. I can testify that her glance is the most penetrating that ever woman had," rejoined Von Walden, laughing.

"And what has she been able to penetrate? I should like to hear from you, as she herself would not like to bring it out."

"Well, let us see, my good mother-in-law. In the first place, she has discovered, very plainly, that I am somewhat of a frivolous fellow."

"That, I do not doubt."

"But, at the same time, she has discovered that this frivolity is of the most amiable and innocent description that one can imagine."

"That I doubt."

"Then I appeal to Marie Louise herself. Is it not true, my angel, that there is not the least thing that is bad in me? I am as soft as wax, and let myself be bent as you please; whilst you, to your honour be it said, have the most splendid talent for this bending process."

"Soft as wax, are you? that is certain," said Marie Louise.

"Now hear her yourself, mother-in-law. Besides this, I have a few little habits——"

"Or, rather, many bad habits."

"Just so, but none dangerous. I like, it is true, a merry bout occasionally; not because I am not very happy in my own paradise, where Marie Louise alone reigns, and plays, at the same time, the part of Eve and the archangel, but because it is so entertaining now and then to look out at the gate and see how the world outside appears."

"That means, because you are tired of your garden of Eden."

"One is never tired of Eden, mother-in-law. This shows how long it is since you have played the part of Eve. But no enjoyment is so great as that which we, from time to time, go without; and only to secure myself this pleasure do I seek society."

"Well, what else do you like?"

"A goblet of good wine with a few good friends: that is not only to my taste, but it enlivens my spirits."

"And dulls them as well, if I remember rightly."

"That was only in the early, more happy times, my good mother-in-law; before our juice of the grape was adulterated. Now, the wine-merchants take care that we shall not run any risk of losing our senses."

"But we lose our money; since what is wanting in quality is replaced by quantity."

"Not at all! We do not take more wine than our fathers, although it may appear so; because we take at many different times what they swallowed at once. Alas! my honoured mother-in-law, think, if we were to measure the two quantities, how many of our pretty glass thimbles would one require to fill a single one of those reverence-inspiring goblets, which do so much honour to the strength and taste of our fathers?"

"Let this matter rest. But have you not another weakness to confess?"

"No; now I think the list is ended, if my memory does not deceive me. Or perhaps you, my dear Marie Louise, do you know of any other little sin to add to it?"

Marie Louise, during this talk, had fallen into thought, and followed the words only with the appearance of attention. She lay, leaning back on the sofa cushions, reflecting on her mother's advice.

"How," said she, and armed herself with a smile, "how can we know what you yourself do not know?"

"Are you not the better part of my soul, the archangel who knows everything?"

"In the latter capacity, I must reveal that you have forgotten your worst sin. I mean that which gained me two shawls in the interesting wager."

"Ah, you little rogue, that I had quite forgotten! But as you are not ashamed to betray me, I may as well confess that I have a little, but very little, inclination for play. I never play high, and never games of chance,—only a little innocent card-playing, as an amusement."

"But this, my son, is a very unfortunate way of spending time; and forgive me, my good Walden, if I speak a serious word with you; you will think that excusable in me as your mother?"

"Nay, for Heaven's sake, no preaching, my good mother-in-law! Marie Louise leads me with much better reins; and allow me, with all possible filial love and reverence, to declare, that no one has ever, nor ever will succeed in curing me of a fault in this manner, even in case it should be necessary."

Mrs. N—— became alternately red and pale; but whilst she did violence to her feelings, she said, in a tone that she intended to be calm, but which had a certain degree of asperity: "I pity the woman who dare only to speak half the truth; and I did not know that Marie Louise could have learnt this art so soon, which is doubtless very useful."

Marie Louise cast a look, not of reproach, but of sorrow on her mother, whilst she thought, "Mamma was right in her determination not to live with us; that would never do."

As far as Von Walden's feelings were concerned, it would have cost him nothing to have carried out the dispute a little longer, were it only to vex his wife, whose sensitiveness he perceived when her mother was offended. But in spite of being himself irritated at Mrs. N——'s answer, he went so far in his calculations as to see how his interest might be served, and a hold obtained on Marie Louise, by his playing the part of a perfectly submissive and polite son.

Marie Louise, who had been dreading an outbreak between her mother and husband, in which it would be a difficult matter to mediate, considering that her partiality would appeal for both, rewarded her husband with the most hearty and grateful look as he seized the hand of his mother-in-law, and kissing it respectfully, answered: "I am indeed sorry to have caused my good mamma uneasiness, and to have called forth a remark, that perhaps was painful to Marie Louise; but let me assure you, that she understands me so well, and so easily guides me when I go astray, that you may quite depend on her wisdom! I am convinced that Heaven never created a more excellent wife than mine; and whom have I to thank for it, but she who made her what she is?"

Von Walden's look and manner were so calculated at this moment to inspire confidence, that even if he did not quite win over his mother-in-law, he perfectly appeased her.

And the end of the interview was, that Mrs. N—— promised her daughter and son-in-law to live at Malcolm's-Ness during their absence, and to superintend the household affairs.

"And now, my dear Marie Louise, it is time to think of our visits in the town. The carriage will be at the door immediately. But I really do not know how it is that the people here, one and all, behave to me as if they had all been steeped in vinegar—and even my respected uncle the burgomaster was in such a hurry, that he scarcely knew whether he had time to offer me a seat. Bless my soul! they are downright absurd, these our dear little townspeople!"

"They are offended, the whole town in a body is offended with you."

"I thought so," rejoined Von Walden; "but how is it that we are so unhappy as to have incurred the displeasure of the respected town?"

"In the first place, because you now belong to the aristocratic society, and also because when you left, you never invited the townspeople to your new home."

"This little perplexity," said Marie Louise, "I will soon set to rights, for it is pleasant to stand on a good footing with one's old acquaintances. Before I have been a couple of minutes with them, I will contrive that the offence be forgotten, and that, at least ten times in a minute, I am called their dear, amiable, good lady."

"Well, my angel," asked the lieutenant, "how will you begin? Now that we are starting on a journey, it will be difficult to remedy our first error, and when we come again, then, you know yourself, dear Marie Louise, that nobles and burghers can never be mixed up together."

"We shall have time enough in future to consider about this. At present I shall adopt a plan which lies nearer at hand; and we shall see whether, to-morrow, when we return home, heads will not be nodding at us from all the windows."

"But we are stopping too long," observed Von Walden. "Shall I ring for the maid, my love?"

"What do you say—ring?" Marie Louise cast a sly look at her husband. "Do you no longer know how?"

"Ay, truly, I know very well, and am still the same attentive husband; but where are the things, then?"

"Does not the dressing-room door stand open? Ah, my dear sir, one sees clearly that we are in the third month of our marriage! Be so good, then, as to fetch me my mantilla."

At the first house—it was of course that of the burgomaster—our young couple were received like two welcome strangers. But when Marie Louise bowed so deeply that her lips almost touched the hand of the old burgomaster's wife, and she addressed her by the title of "aunt," and said: "Ah, how fresh and well our aunt looks!" the old lady's mouth relaxed into a slight smile; and as Marie Louise, in the same breath, added: "A little journey into the country will certainly not do you any harm, aunt!" then the aunt's smile extended to her whole face.

After some mutual expressions of politeness had been exchanged, the young lady continued,—"We cannot have the pleasure of seeing our uncle and aunt at our house before we set off on our journey, as we could not trouble them to come out to us in the uncertain spring weather; we hope, at least, that mamma, who during our absence is to be at Malcolm's-Ness, will have the honour when she can offer them cherries or something good. As soon as we come back ourselves, it will be our greatest pleasure to see our friends often at our house."

"Ah, my dear niece, you are really too kind."

"Dear aunt, I beg you will not mention it, or I shall not be able to ask my aunt whether she would not like some fruit from Malcolm's-Ness for preserving. We have excellent fruit, and many different kinds, out of which you can choose what you like."

The burgomaster's wife followed her beloved niece not only to the threshold, but to the very lowest step.

At the other friends', the same scene was repeated, with only some slight alterations, according to the tastes of each individual, which Marie Louise knew so well. To some, she promised cuttings of rare plants; to another, the new French cauliflowers; to a third, asparagus; to a fourth, flowers, &c. But at one place, where it was somewhat more difficult to bring about a good understanding, she went so far in her politeness as to offer to a so-called old friend, who was complaining of the difficulty of getting wool fine enough for a shawl she was knitting, a couple of pounds of particularly fine Spanish wool which she happened to have. This decided everything in the lady's favour. Out of the mouths of the owners of the sharpest tongues in the town flowed only honey and nectar; and it proved that Marie Louise was right: for the next morning, as the master and mistress of Malcolm's-Ness drove through the town on their return home, Mrs. N——, who accompanied them, could see how all the ladies of the town rivalled each other in the friendliness of their greetings.

The carriage stopped at Counsellor Utter's door. Marie Louise had not found Mistress Utter at home the day before, and she could not set off on her journey without taking leave of the good-hearted old lady. Now sat Aunt Gretchen, in her clean starched apron and her smartest cap, awaiting the visit of her grand acquaintances, with a tray prepared ready with wine and choice cakes.

Here no comedy was played. With an emotion that passed from heart to heart, Marie Louise pressed in her arms the good old lady, Williamson's mother-like friend, and Mistress Utter, who was noble enough to have forgotten the anger that Marie Louise had occasioned her in having caused so much grief to her favourite, returned the embrace quite as warmly, and spoke long and heartily with the young wife.

Whilst Von Walden was assisting his mother-in-law into the carriage, and the counsellor was lamenting that he should lose his good neighbour so long, Marie Louise whispered to Mistress Utter, as she stood near her in the doorway: "Good Mistress Utter, remember me kindly to the friend—that I once had. I think I ought to leave a parting message behind, now that I am going so far away."

"I know not," answered Aunt Gretchen, quite as softly, "whether I ought to accept this commission. I do not think it is advisable to rouse up the bear when he is asleep. Forgive an old woman who speaks as she thinks, and therefore may whisper to the young one, that a message that she cannot give openly, ought never to pass the lips of a married wife? Bygones are bygones, and had better be forgotten."

Marie Louise answered nothing. She only pressed the hand of the old lady, and her delicate-minded friend understood well the expression that passed over her face, when she once more, as the counsellor led her to the carriage, cast a glance at the upper story.

"The poor creature!" said Aunt Gretchen, when the visitors had left, "she will have too long to repent of her error!"

* * * * * *

As the landau drove up to the entrance of the principal building at Malcolm's-Ness, its occupants could see standing at the other end of the court-yard a red-brown gig, near which the unharnessed horse was busy taking a little refreshment.

"To whom does that carriage belong?" asked Von Walden, evidently surprised, of the servant who came to open the carriage door.

"To the Advocate Pellander—he has been here for a couple of hours, and wished to wait for your arrival." Marie Louise cast on her husband an inquiring look. She had never doubted but that he had fulfilled his promise of arranging his affairs. Nevertheless she could not but be surprised at this visit. Von Walden understood the silent inquiry of her eyes, and whispered in a low tone: "Fear nothing, my angel—this rascal and I have already done with each other."

Marie Louise led her mother to her room, during which

Von Walden went to his own, where Pellander had established himself in a comfortable easy chair, and had employed the time of waiting for the lieutenant in an agreeable *siesta.* Awakened, however, by the entrance of the host, he stood up, and rubbing his eyes, said: "Your obedient servant, lieutenant; excuse my resting a little after my journey, as I waited for you! We have not seen each other since we had our little affair together."

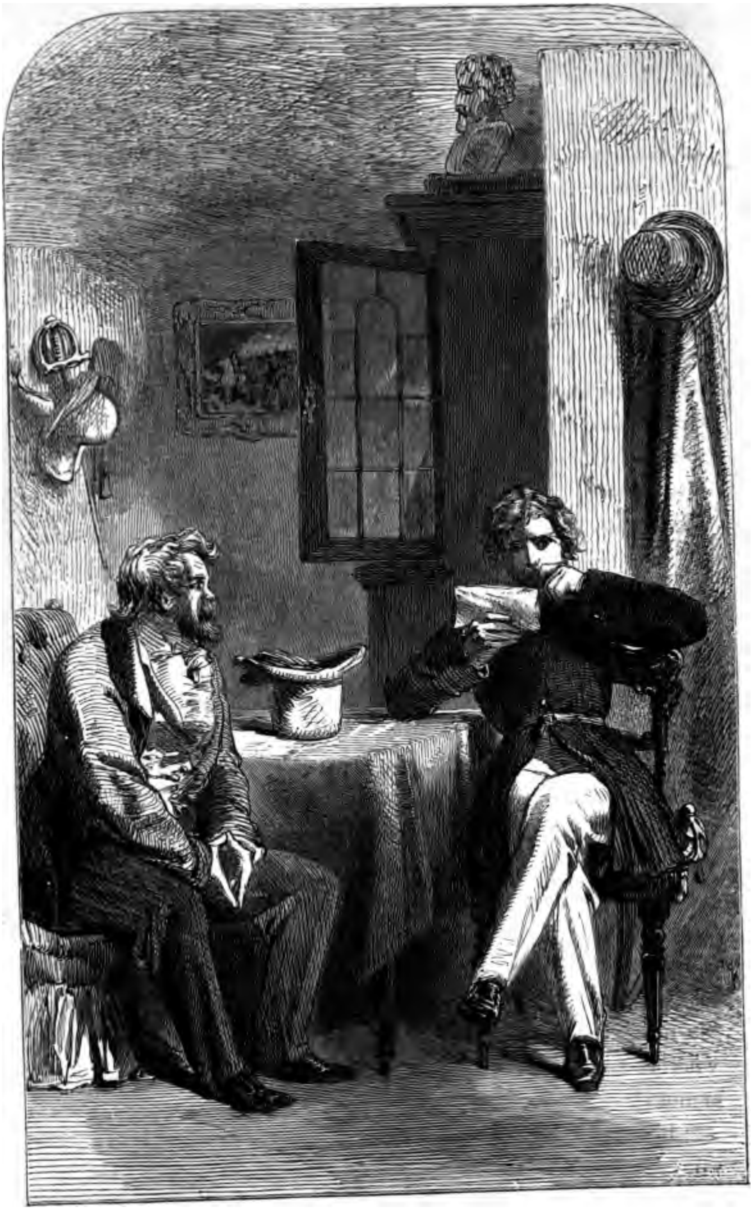
"No, I have not had the honour," answered Von Walden, with ironical politeness: "but what procures me the pleasure of this present meeting?"

"Again a little business—but a far more respectable affair than the first."

"I do not understand what it can be about; but have the goodness meantime to be seated."

"A certain person, of the name of G——," began Pellander, "an old acquaintance of the lieutenant's, who has, as he says, written letter after letter to him, and as he has received no answers to any of them, has become tired of this loyal and respectful manner of trying to make himself heard. He thought, he writes me, that the lieutenant would, in his altered circumstances, remember of himself the obligations between you, but as in this, as well as the hope of an answer to his letters, he has been disappointed, it is my duty to inform you that he has formed the resolution of having recourse to law. At the same time he has commissioned me, as a person well known to fame in the management of ticklish affairs, to propose to you, Mr. Lieutenant, a rather more respectable manner of settling the matter."

Whilst Pellander brought forward his business, Von Walden walked up and down, now stopping before a bird-cage and playing with the bird, now gaping, and now whistling. At last, as Pellander closed his lips, he threw himself negligently on the



PELLANDER'S INTERVIEW WITH VON WALDEN.

sofa, and cried: "Upon my honour, Mr. Pellander, you were born to make speeches."

"I was born to be an administrator of justice," answered Pellander, offended at the lieutenant's tone, as well as at the indifferent manner in which he received his communication, "and I wish to know what answer it pleases you to give to my proposal. Are we to have strife or peace?"

"Strife, by all means—yet, no, my good Mr. Pellander, I am not suited for such warfare. But, in confidence, let me tell you that I have at the present moment a great number of purchases to make for our intended journey, and must therefore request a year's delay. How much is the damage? The amount has escaped my memory, and it is not mentioned in this letter."

Pellander handed him a memorandum of the affair. Von Walden turned pale. "What the d—l!" cried he, as he stroked his chin several times, "that is indeed——"

"Yes, yes," rejoined Pellander, with complacency, "I told you the affair was respectable. Yet that does not matter. I was always known as a liberal man. As you are intending just now to take a long journey, a lawsuit would naturally be inconvenient. It would therefore be better to listen to my propositions. The half of the sum in eight days from this, and for the rest, the delay of a year, of course paying the proper interest."

"Impossible!" cried Von Walden. "Are you in your senses, sir? Do you think I can coin money?"

"Any one who gets rid of it so quickly ought to be able to make it," answered Pellander, undisturbed, true to his duty and his usual free speaking. "Now, however, the only question is whether Lieutenant Walden chooses to have the matter settled, or not?"

"I cannot tell you. Be a little reasonable. A fourth of the sum, and a little douceur——"

"Will never do; my proposals are definitive."

The matter was long discussed. At last Von Walden, taking into consideration several circumstances known only to himself and his creditor, was obliged to give his word that at the appointed time the money should be ready. This would be extremely inconvenient just at the present moment; but there was no escape. After being married only three months, he could not venture on entangling himself again in lawsuits, although it was his weakness and so-called principle always to gain time, were it only a few weeks or months, in the hope of finding fresh resources or expedients.

"What is the matter in question?" asked Marie Louise, as Von Walden entered the saloon and found her alone. "Nothing connected with your former bachelor days, I hope?"

"How can you ask such a question, my angel? Did you not, with your usual good sense, advise all those perplexities being put an end to at once; and do you not remember that the first weeks of our coming here was devoted to setting them in order?"

"My good Walden, if, however, there should be some little debts left standing, I entreat you not to deceive me, from any false shame. Be sincere, and, for God's sake, let them be paid, rather than undertake this journey, which could be very well postponed for a year. I do not know how it was, but I was uneasy directly I saw that man here."

"Ah, what fancies, my love. It is quite unpardonable in you to get hold of them. But to set you at ease, I must tell you what I actually promised to keep secret. The poor fellow has come to request a favour of me, in return for that which he did me, you know."

"God be thanked! that is delightful, I am glad it is nothing else."

"And yet it is not so very delightful;—I am to be security for him."

"For a considerable sum?"

"Oh, no; it is really only a trifle—such people have no important affairs. Merely a couple of hundred dollars. But a man, to be quite regular in his affairs, should not give security."

"You did not refuse him?" Marie Louise's heart felt a little attachment for Pellander, since he had, "in the name of humanity," so befriended Williamson.

"No, I could not bring my heart to it, my darling, since, on the whole, it is right pleasant to be able to help one's fellow-creatures, when it does not touch our own interests too closely."

The conversation was here broken off, and, very naturally, was not resumed.

Von Walden's present income, which had not yet suffered any great inroads, the greater part of his debts being yet unpaid, seemed too considerable for it to be necessary to grudge an occasional outlay. He was therefore of good courage, and had no intention to spare himself an indulgence that could be had for money.

It was arranged that, whilst he was obliged to be absent for a time with his regiment, Marie Louise should spend the interval at a mineral spring, from whence they would start on their long journey.

CHAPTER XXI.

FRAGMENT FROM THE LETTER OF A FRIEND TO WILLIAMSON.

"A LONG column of figures stood before me on the paper. I reckoned and reckoned, and thought I must have become silly, whilst, far from getting my business done, I felt my head begin to swim. Quite alarmed, I got off my office-stool, and cried out with a loud voice: "Deuce take me, this will never do. I am ruining my health here. I shall be having a fit, if I do not have change of air. I will be off."

After this important resolution, which I had so suddenly brought to maturity, I sat down again quietly on my stool at my green desk. The figures had become plain before my eyes, so much had the idea of shaking the dust from off my brain already effected.

I went up to my wife, who stared to see me appear a whole quarter of an hour before dinner-time; and she stared still more when I said: "Listen to me, my little Augusta; we must travel, my child."

"What should we do that for?" asked she, looking at me somewhat mistrustfully.

"For many reasons, dearest 'Gusta. We will go to some of the Springs, or Baths, or some such place."

"We?"

"Yes, we, my child. You know that when I have once resolved on a matter, it is the same as done."

My little Augusta looked quite aghast. "During the ten years that we have been married, you have only taken two journeys on business."

"All the more necessary, then, that I should, for once in my life, take a journey for pleasure. Set off, then, my little old woman, and get together all that you want; set all the needle-women in the whole town to work—in a fortnight we must start."

And in a fortnight we did set off.

* * * * * *

I and my Augusta, who in our dear home are a happy pair, did not at first know what we were about, when we found ourselves in the crowd of strange people and strange pleasures. But we joined in it all, for for this we had come. My friend, my dear friend, I have seen your old love, the young lady of the bow-windowed room. She is, indeed, a downright pretty and charming woman. She was here before us, and was at first without her husband. As one cannot, however, keep all the names in one's head that are stunning about one's ears, I had not paid any attention to hers. Her person, however, attracted my attention the first day; for she is so much courted, and surrounded by so many people, that she could not fail to excite notice. At last I heard her name, and found that I had an old acquaintance before me.

I do not know whether I ought to congratulate you or condole with you on the loss of this lady, who one day excites my admiration and the next my anger. She is beautiful, lively, amiable; but, upon my honour, she is at the same time vain, fond of dress, and coquettish,—at least so she appears. There is no woman in the whole place so given up to all its pleasures. She discovers them for herself, one madder than the other; but the others all run after her, and exclaim—"It is divine, and cannot be otherwise, since Madame von Walden had proposed it!"

She is, however, kind-hearted. Many poor creatures she has in secret assisted: for one couple she set on foot a subscription, and that this succeeded well, you may judge, when she collected the so-called mites in a basket herself.

But now we have something new. Her husband has come from his regiment. That man is to me a tangled skein of silk. There is a report going about here, that at the place—I forget what it is called—where his regiment is quartered, he has been living like a Turk. When he came here he looked all the worse for it; and his wife must that evening have been in rather an excited state of mind. Since that time she has never seemed the same person. One day she will bloom like a rose; and the next, in spite of her efforts to carry her head high, she droops like a lily.

She has found favour in the eyes of my Augusta. She, who has a glance as searching as noble, sees the young woman from a closer point of sight than the others, who look at her only through magnifying and distorting glasses. Augusta has remarked that she suffers, and that she has hours of sorrow which do not agree with her lively manners in company. The poor little thing!—And he, the wretch! is for ever card-playing with a set of kindred spirits, not, as you may well imagine, of the best sort. Their days are devoted to amusements of a suitable nature to the evenings which succeed them.

It is not to be denied that this woman has a dignity about her which inspires respect. One can see that she has still some influence over her husband; and it does one's heart good to see and hear how kindly, how skilfully, she understands how to give a colouring to his frequent absence from the company and from herself; and how, when he returns, she has ever a smiling and cheerful word upon her lips. One sees, also, if this word does not appease him in time, that an evasive look, or a serious expression on her countenance, can arouse his irritability, which not often is vented on little things. She requires much reason, and she has it; and yet I fear that in the end no means will avail. * *

They have left. On the last evening that she appeared in society, she was dazzling. She wafted roses around her, and roses bloomed upon her cheeks, and wit flowed from her lips. She left a painfully sweet remembrance behind her, in the circle where she had been so admired. But my Augusta and I, we pitied her.

To-morrow, we also return to our happy, peaceful home, and are grateful to God that this time is over. At least ten years will pass over, before we shall be tempted again with the desire of not only seeing, but joining in, the follies of the world. I longed for, nay, I pined after, my old desk, and Augusta after her little ones, her kitchen, and pantry. Would to God, the admired Madame von Walden had been like my Augusta, and she would then have chosen a safer lot than that which doubtless awaits her.

* * * * * *

My friend William, my dear friend! these lines I write at home. I wish you could have seen us! You have a heart to understand what a home is. The children hung weeping round our necks. Even on my desk-stool, my true old companion, I let fall—God forgive it me!—a great tear of joy. But I was ashamed of the tear, and wiped it off again.

Say, now, whether I too have not sent you what deserves to be called a "sketch!"

God bless you! Let us hear from you soon; and send us something different from your eternal scraps, which, as you are pleased to observe, contain always the same story—viz., "Next time more."

Thy friend, KARL."

Part the Third.

CHAPTER XXII.

Alas! unheeded is my anxious prayer,
My tears unnoticed fall;
Like as a flower I fade in autumn's air.
VITALIS.

Two years have passed away. Marie Louise had in this period tasted of nearly every species of froth that rises on the cup of life. She had travelled, lived, and enjoyed; she had laughed, wept, and suffered; she had been fêted and worshipped as one of the idols of the day; she had shone in the society of towns, and coquetted at mineral Springs and Baths;—and now it has become time to seek repose, and put an end to all this dissipation before it becomes fatal to her peace.

Alas! in many a night of sorrow and loneliness, she had in vain sighed after this repose, and done all in her power as a woman and a wife to check the speed with which they both were hastening to one common end; but Marie Louise had no longer any power to influence Von Walden, nor was she able to separate from him.

They had now returned again to Sweden, brought home by the impossibility of obtaining any longer from their steward the enormous remittances which Walden constantly demanded;

and on their way to Malcolm's-Ness, were again at the same Baths from which they had set out on their travels two years before.

Partly influenced by the hope of being able here to have recourse to some of his usual expedients for arranging his disordered affairs, and partly held by the reins of his ungovernable passion for play, Von Walden postponed from day to day his departure, in spite of the emptiness of his travelling purse, and in defiance of the entreaties of Marie Louise.

It was evening. The lady's maid, wearied out with waiting for her master and mistress, had fallen asleep, but sprang hastily up as she heard voices approaching, and, lighting the candles on the toilette-table, she opened the door.

Marie Louise entered, throwing off the light mantle which covered her ball dress. She was followed by Von Walden, no longer in the vigour of youth, but sallow and haggard, an evident victim to secret orgies. He threw himself negligently on the sofa.

In Marie Louise's face was to be perceived, at first, no remarkable change, but as the ornaments of the toilette one after another disappeared,—as the tresses of her hair were put back and concealed beneath the simple lace cap, then could it be seen that the fresh roses of her cheeks had, like the peace of her mind, long since faded away. Yet, still could this woman look proudly around her; for amidst a thousand temptations had she stood safe and firm. Not once had the breath of slander fallen on her fair fame. Society had engrossed her senses, but not her soul. She had restlessly endeavoured to hasten the flight of time, and had tried to escape that which, under the mask of gaiety, told her that she was irrecoverably wretched. Such was the fate of Marie Louise; such is the fate of thousands of women, and such will be that of thousands more.

Yet was she still beautiful, and an expression of the sweetest joy, quite different from that which had appeared on her countenance as she entered, now lighted up her features, as with a light in her hand she entered on tip-toe the open door of an inner room. There slumbered in peaceful repose a child on his little snow white bed; Marie Louise was a mother; she possessed a being whom she could love, and for whom she could live. In spite of this, however, she dared to call herself unhappy. She passionately loved her little son, now more than a year old, and devoted to him a considerable portion of each day. Yet, at times, she required a more powerful diversion to her thoughts, when care and anxiety, at the constant irregularities of her husband, gnawed at her peace, and when the slumbering ashes of her own former passion revived, and rekindled also her repentance and despair.

As yet, however, she had no conception of the bad condition of their affairs, since Von Walden, who more than ever had recourse to falsehood and deceit of all kinds, had prevented her, by false pretexts, from seeing any of the letters that he received from home. Those that she received from her mother were, indeed, full of uneasiness; but could not this uneasiness be sufficiently accounted for in Von Walden's extravagant expenditure and long delayed absence from home?

After Marie Louise had impressed a light, yet tender kiss upon her child's brow, she returned again to her own room. Her eye now fell for the first time on two letters, which lay on her table. The maid was gone; the husband and wife were alone.

"Have you seen these letters?" asked Marie Louise; "one is from mamma to me, the other is for you."

"How should I have seen them? Who the d—l can see all this stuff? I have at least ten or twelve such in my pocket-book, but as they have no doubt all the same contents, there they may lie." Von Walden had, in fact, spared himself of late the vexation of reading the threatening letters of his creditors.

Marie Louise broke open her mother's letter, and, as she read it, an expression of the deepest agitation passed over her countenance. When the letter was ended she was near fainting; but, conquering this feminine weakness, she twice essayed to speak, but her voice had forsaken her.

"Well, what are these interesting and remarkable tidings? They seem to prevent you from being able to sing your usual evening song."

"Good God, Von Walden! how can you joke?"

"Why not? I shall like to know, even if it is something very affecting, why I should weep?—whining suits women better than men."

"Do you know what is going on at home?" asked, at last, Marie Louise, with a violent effort.

"No; but I have no reason to think that anything is going on wrong."

"This is frightful. You have deceived me; your largest debts were unpaid when we left Sweden. Lawsuits are commenced in every direction; executions have followed one after another, and the steward, who is in the greatest perplexity, threatens to leave everything to take its course, if you do not immediately return to arrange matters."

"A remarkably pretty state of things, I must confess; and especially effective must it be, described by your mother: it will lose nothing by her telling."

"Are you not ashamed to torment me in this way? You know full well how long mamma has spared me the knowledge; just so long as it was possible; but now our situation can no longer be kept a secret, and it is thought that if we would save something for the future, we must sell Malcolm's-Ness, and purchase a smaller estate."

"What? Malcolm's-Ness be sold? Yes, indeed, that would be an excellent way of settling matters; and it shows the great sense of those who propose it. Trouble yourself no more about the whole concern. I can manage my affairs best myself; and when I return, I will soon, upon my honour, put a new face upon the matter. That fool of a steward is quite unsuited for his office."

"When shall we start? Ah, my good Walden, let us set off to-morrow?"

"To-morrow! Why not? I must, however, procure some travelling money, for I have nothing but two miserable pieces of ten dollars left, which will not go far in settling our account here, and paying our way home."

"Good God! Where, then, is the money that was in the cash-box?"

"Gone to the d—l!" was Von Walden's laconic answer.

"That is frightful," said Marie Louise, turning pale. "How could you leave us so penniless?"

"This is the usual way. The women take the easiest part upon themselves, of complaining and lamenting; whilst we are forced to employ all our dexterity and penetration to get out of the difficulty."

"You must borrow—humiliating as it may be."

"Humiliating, indeed. But it is no easy matter to get money that way, when I have already borrowed so much, that I do not know to whom I could apply."

"And the money you have borrowed?" sighed Marie Louise.

"Out of inward sympathy, has gone to keep company with the rest."

"And we are then in the most deplorable extremity. What, in the name of heaven, must be done?"

"Yes, discover that if you can; that would be more creditable to a woman than lamenting over what cannot be altered."

Marie Louise was silent for some minutes, and then said, slowly, as if considering to herself: "If you will promise me faithfully that we shall leave to-morrow——"

"Well, what then?" asked Walden eagerly, with the look and tone of a bloodhound.

"Then, but only in that case, I have a little sum put aside, that I saved luckily in case of any pressing occasion; I know of none more important than that we should get home directly, and I think the sum is sufficient."

"Spoken as becomes a good wife, my darling! you see that I have not forgotten my old love-making names, when you behave as you ought. Where is your treasure? Hand it over to me!"

"To-morrow will be time enough, when you have arranged every thing for our journey."

"Indeed! so now we are to have suspicions again, I see? Well, keep your savings—we will stay where we are. I have credit, and I can enjoy myself as long as it lasts."

"Dear Walden! do not speak so. You know that we must return home."

"Certainly, when I have got money, and can make up my accounts."

"Well, then, I will give it you to-morrow morning early—now we must go to rest."

"Rest as much as you please, I shall take a little walk, as I have nothing to do at home."

"Will you not sleep?"

"No."

"That means, that you are angry with me!"

"No."

"Ah, do not be so hard upon me—promise me, at least, faithfully, that you will remain at home if you get the money directly!"

"Yes, certainly—but do not plague me any longer."

Sighing, Marie Louise went to the writing-desk, and, opening a little secret drawer, took out a money case.

But the case was—empty!

"Good heavens! what is this?" Marie Louise pressed her hands to her brows in agony.

Her last resource was gone.

It was a painful sight, that expression of consternation and despair upon her countenance, contrasted with the remains of her ball costume, not yet thrown off.

"Did you mean *that* money?" asked Walden, with a look which only expressed a sort of negligent surprise; "that I made use of a long time ago!"

"And you took this money? It is not possible!"

"I see nothing impossible in it—I only wish it were there to take again. Man and wife should have but one common purse, I think."

"In certain cases—but secretly to take money from each other, good God!"

"No exclamations, I beg. Thine is mine, and mine is thine—so I understand the ceremony of betrothal, and whether one takes money out of a drawer or any other place, it is still common property."

"And now, are we without resource—wholly without resource?"

"Yes, so it would appear, in case you have not by chance another treasure, saved out of the liberal allowance for pin-money that I set aside for you."

"That was scarcely sufficient for the purpose. This other sum, however, was the remains of a little capital that I possessed at the time when I had the command of my own property."

"In other words, the time when I had the command of my own liberty, and lived each day as it pleased me, and was not exposed to losing my patience in listening to all the jeremiads that matrimony has inflicted on me. Ah, that was a fine time!"

Marie Louise was silent. Her eyes sought to penetrate through the darkness to the heaven that overhung alike the earth and her own sorrows with a gloomy cloud. "Alas!" thought the suffering woman, "who would not be there!"

Neither of them broke the silence. At last Von Walden took up his hat and went to the door.

"I entreat you," said Marie Louise, earnestly, "do not go out to night—let us consider seriously what is to be done!"

"We have considered enough, as there is no money to be had! A couple of friends await me—my last dollars may as well go to see if they cannot bring others to keep them company."

"No, in the name of Heaven, do not go! What will people think who might meet you at this hour, and the public rooms are all closed?"

"Who wants the public rooms? I am invited to join an acquaintance who has a little bachelor's party in his rooms—that is all!"

"But you are not a bachelor, my good Walden!" Marie Louise tried to move him by affectionate words.

"No, alas! but that need not prevent my taking a part in a merry bout."

Marie Louise entreated, entreated long—but in vain! Von Walden went.

What hours were then passed by the unhappy wife. Walking up and down her room, her thoughts flew back over an interval of four years, to the time of her quiet life in the obscure bow-windowed room. A future of light and blessedness had then lain before her; but her heart, possessed by the ignoble passions of vanity and pride, had spurned and regretted the peaceful heaven offered to her, to embrace a phantom of happiness that had never,

never been realized! And to what had her pride and her love of shining led her? Into this frightful labyrinth, out of which she could see no chance of escape. For come what would, Walden would never reform. Nothing, no love, no sacrifice, no change of circumstances, not even the most fearful misfortunes would ever check his unfortunate passion. As long as a single stiver of their property remained would it be squandered by him. Where could she turn too with her child, and her aged and infirm mother? And how would she now be judged of by those who formerly envied her? How would they triumph, when they saw her return home, God alone knows how? Yes, God alone knows—for she could not even realize to herself the whole misery of her position.

And the only friend in whom she could now have confided, she who perhaps by her counsels had fostered her unhappy failings, she was gone, for ever gone! The Baroness Charlotte, in the first year of their absence from home, had been snatched away by death. The baron had sold Segerstad. Nowhere had she a friend from whom she could ask either sympathy or advice. Alas! what a painful want! to pour out her complaints to her own mother, whose counsel and warnings she had so opposed, for that was Marie Louise still too proud—and of what use would it have been? They understood each other, and the mother read in the heart of her daughter both her sorrow and repentance, without their clothing themselves in words.

The night became stormy. Dark clouds hung over the sky, and rain began to beat against the windows. The hours passed slowly. Marie Louise listened anxiously for footsteps in the street. She went into her child's room, and sank on her knees by the side of its bed. She prayed fervently for peace and courage; she prayed that, for the sake of her child, a ray of light might penetrate the darkness of her soul, and show her the way in which she must follow.

Strengthened in mind, she arose to pursue again her pacings to and fro in her own room. She considered every expedient. To borrow from friends? Impossible! And besides, even this resource had been exhausted by Von Walden. She possessed things that could be disposed of—ornaments of value; this would be a means. But, alas! how humiliating, should it be known; and, in such a place, how could it be concealed? To write home, and await there the return of letters, would require too much time; and besides this, Walden had but lately received money for their return home, which was all that could be got together. Marie Louise could understand, from her mother's letter, that large sums had been raised upon the estate; and now all—all was lost.

Without having fixed on any certain plan with respect to the means, Marie Louise had, however, before morning dawned, adopted the firm determination to return, even if alone with her child, to her home—the home that might be hers for so short a time. At length she heard the footsteps of some one in the street. The step was too well known to her, although it seemed now, even more unsteady than usual. Prepared for the worst, and yet struggling to overcome her trembling, she opened softly the door.

Von Walden's appearance betokened but too plainly how the night had been spent. Marie Louise offered him a chair, but he rejected it, and sank, dressed as he was, upon the yet undisturbed bed.

"Well, have you nothing to ask?" said he, with a fiercely wild laugh.

"No! unless, what o'clock it is; I did not hear it strike the last time."

"If you want to know, you must wait until it strikes again, for my watch has gone, with the last card, to the d—l."

"Your gold watch—the one I gave you?"

"Yes—the one you gave me. So tenderly—only think! How could I find it in my heart to part with it? But it is gone, nevertheless—to save my honour. You know that one must keep up appearances."

"But the chain—for Heaven's sake! you have surely kept the chain? It was my hair!"

"I did not think of the rubbish. The chain was included in the bargain; and as the good friend to whom I lost it was always one of your admirers, I hope he will take this keepsake as a compensation for the rest of the money I owe him."

The last trace of colour forsook the cheeks of Marie Louise. She was perfectly convinced that Von Walden had still sufficient sense of honour left to demand back when sober again the chain; but to know it, in the meantime, in such hands, thoughtlessly thrown away by her own husband—oh, it was indeed bitter! and tears, which until now had been refused her, gushed from her eyes, as she thought of this humiliation, so galling to her sensitive feelings as a wife.

Von Walden fell asleep at last, after laughing at her tears, and ridiculing her gestures of sorrow and despair. But the next morning, when in her morning dress, and after being up the whole night, she approached his bed, and awakening him, entreated him to get up and dress himself before the maid should see him, the events of the night returned clearly to his remembrance, and, without saying a word, he dressed himself hastily, and went out. It was of importance to him that this affair should not get wind; and besides this, some of the restraints of honour had yet dominion over him. He would not have wished to have given away thus his wife's hair; it was done without knowing it. An hour after, he returned, and threw the chain down upon the table. "The trumpery has cost me more than it was worth," said he.

"How so?" asked Marie Louise, as she took back the now superfluous gift.

"If I would have left it, I could certainly have borrowed something on it."

"For God's sake be silent, in mercy!" Her cheeks were dyed with the blush of scorn, and, leaving her husband, she went to her child's room.

"Do not waste your time there!" called Von Walden after her.

Marie Louise, who at her husband's return had sent away the maid, took now herself the little one in her arms, and returned with him into the bed-room.

"What in the world do you want with the child?—let him be quiet!"

"I only want to take care of him;" and giving the child some flowers to play with, which she had worn the evening before, she placed him in her lap, and leaning her head on the golden locks of the little seraph, she said, in a low voice: "Shall we now deliberate on what must be done?"

"With all my heart. What ornaments have you? There is a person here who can lend us money on them."

"And will they be silent?"

"I think so; but if not, a little cash is even more necessary than silence. A little perplexity of the kind on a journey is the most trifling occurrence in the world, and might happen to anybody."

"I look upon it, however, as the most painful circumstance imaginable. I can, indeed, scarcely venture to look out of the window, in the fear that our dilemma could be seen on my face."

"Do not talk such nonsense! On the contrary, you must this evening appear unusually well dressed at the Countess A——'s party—remember, it is our last evening. In whatever perplexity we are, we must have enough presence of mind not, by want of tact, to draw attention on us."

"And do you think that, on such a day, I could go into company—impossible!"

"I do not think it, my precious one, I require it. Do you understand, Marie Louise? I require it!"

"You may do what you please yourself, but I am determined not to go out until we leave our rooms to return home."

"I am sorry for this resolution, since, in that case, I suspect there will be no longer any question of returning at all."

"Do not drive me into going beyond the bounds of the submission I have always shown you, Walden," entreated Marie Louise, with ever-increasing agitation, "for to-day—I must tell you at once—to-day I am determined not to submit."

"Really? You quite astonish me!"

"It may be so!"

"It is only a pity that I do not like being so surprised, and am therefore obliged to request you to be so amiable as to return to your duty."

"My first duty is to seek a shelter for my child," said Marie Louise, as she pressed the boy closely to her bosom; "and if you will not arrange your affairs so that we can start to-morrow, then——"

"Then?"

"Then I shall return by myself. This is my firm and unalterable resolution."

Walden burst at first into loud laughter; but after having observed his wife more closely for a few minutes, he began to perceive that he had driven her to a point where a joke on his side could effect nothing. He advanced a few steps towards her, and said: "Give me the jewels."

"When you have promised me that we shall leave to-morrow; that the post-horses shall be ordered to-day; and that I shall be allowed to decline the invitation of the countess."

"No, upon my honour, this is somewhat too strong!" exclaimed

Walden, passionately. "You dictate to me one thing after another like a schoolboy. Please to remember that I am your husband, whom you are bound to obey, and not your slave, whom you may command."

"There is no question of commanding on either side," replied Marie Louise, with feigned composure; "and my last word is, that I will not give up a single jewel on any other conditions than those I have said."

"And of what use are your conditions? Do you not see that I must receive your jewels, turn them into gold, write an order, and yet have very good reasons for fixing our departure for to-morrow?"

"Certainly; and you can also lose at play this money, which will afford us the only means of leaving this place. But I have yet sufficient confidence in you to feel convinced that you will not deceive me so cruelly. And is it not also necessary for you yourself to leave, for in a few days you will have nothing left either to play with or live upon?"

Von Walden, who himself could see that this latter fact was as clear as day, and yet was incapable of willingly yielding, to give his thoughts another direction, took up, mechanically, the yet unopened letter. The contents were short, but they were sufficient to change all hesitation and irresolution into strength and determination.

The letter contained only these lines:

"If within fourteen days from this time you do not return to give me a personal interview in your own home, in order to come to some decisive settlement, I swear solemnly that I will make public all the circumstances connected with your debt to me. In case you should wish any longer to put my patience to the proof, and cause my ruin, Pellander has positive instructions how to proceed. Take your choice! C. G."

Marie Louise had with uneasiness watched the countenance of her husband. His face expressed at once anger and dismay. But quickly resuming a tone of careless indifference, which he thought best suited to deceive his wife, he said, with a lengthened yawn: "Nothing of importance, only an old friend, who is at the point of death."

"And our journey; what do you resolve upon doing?"

"Why, not to hear this detested preaching any longer, I will get ready for it. Give me the jewels and be quiet. I will order post-horses this evening, so as to give our departure the appearance of necessity. Your mother is suddenly taken ill, we can say, and you will, you must, return to see after her. Ah, that will be believed by every body who knows the ungovernable impetuosity of women when anything is amiss."

"I hope some other pretext will occur to you," said Marie Louise. "Even the idea of such a pretended calamity makes me shudder."

"Well, shudder if you please! I know I shall have enough to do before I have been round to tell the tale to every one, but now, be quick; the horses must be at the door by six o'clock."

Marie Louise brought out the greater part of her costly jewels.

And Von Walden, who was now impelled by a powerful motive to the performance of his promise, arranged everything so that they actually started on their journey at the appointed time.

As Marie Louise sat in the carriage, her thoughts turned back to the interval which had elapsed between her first and last visit to the place she was leaving, and, with a sigh, she said to herself: "What is called the bloom of my youth has not been without thorns; and the future which awaits me will indeed have few roses to offer."

CHAPTER XXIII.

No longer call
The joys of life;
The star of hope
With golden day
Lights up no more
The world for me.
STAGNELIUS.

MARIE LOUISE lay on her mother's bosom—this ever loving and faithful mother, who had exerted every effort to do her duty in the difficult position in which she had been placed.

Now that she had Marie Louise again with her, and held in her arms her little grandchild, she felt that all her sorrow and all her hours of anxiety were atoned for.

"God be praised!" said she; "now can we at least bear together whatever stroke may fall on you; but, my child, you must prepare yourself for the very worst."

"I am prepared, mamma; I am calm, perfectly calm—if only you had not to suffer on my account."

"Then I should be no mother, my child. But if Walden would only listen to reason, and be persuaded, now there is still time, to sell Malcolm's-Ness and purchase the little Brody estate, we should at least see something like security for the future."

"He is so determined in the matter, dear mamma, that all arguments are vain."

"Well, he will soon be forced to it, when it, perhaps, will not sell to such advantage as on the terms now offered."

"Terms offered! Has there, then, been any talk of selling it?"

"Not exactly, since the matter could not be discussed until Walden had been conferred with. But there are two gentlemen in M—— who wish to purchase the estate. They applied, through an agent, to the steward; since, in the neighbourhood here, my child, Walden's embarrassed circumstances are sufficiently well known to justify such an application."

"Is it, indeed, come to this?" sighed Marie Louise, whilst she hid her face in her hands.

"Do not view it in a worse light than it deserves, my child. When one is on the point of losing much, one may thank God that something is to be saved. Brody is a pretty little estate. It does not bring much in, to be sure, but quite enough for a quiet, humble manner of life; anything, too, is better than staying here at Malcolm's-Ness for another year or two, only to leave it as beggars at last."

"Alas, mamma! that fate awaits us any how, for whatever comes to Walden's hands, whether much or little, it goes all the same way."

"But this must be provided against, my Marie Louise! The same good, ever right judging friend, who, during your absence, has several times assisted me in difficulties, which my situation here exposed me to, is at the same time the agent for these gentlemen of whom I spoke; and as he sees that you and your child's future comfort can be secured by this means, he has suggested the purchase of Brody. Although he has not gone much into your private affairs, yet he has advised as a friend that, in case Malcolm's-Ness should be sold, a portion of the proceeds should be claimed for you. In this way, Brody would be yours, and Walden, to his own advantage, be prevented from getting rid of it."

"I guess who this friend is, who has so much at heart my future security; but——"

"But what? Have you not duties to fulfil towards your child?"

"And towards my mother, my beloved, good mother, whose latter days, with unpardonable thoughtlessness, I did not secure from want when I had the means. Oh, that is my greatest trouble! But I always fancied that the possessor of Malcolm's-Ness could never have to weep for such an error."

"Care not for me, my dear Marie Louise. I have not yet forgetten how to prepare my old chocolate cakes; and besides, our little town would never let me feel want. But we have not yet come to that. I shall still remain with you, and if you will only follow my advice, you will always have a shelter to offer your mother under your own roof."

"Alas! one knows not what may be left when Malcolm's-Ness is divided, and each one takes his share; and, moreover, believe me, no one will persuade Walden to allow it to be sold."

Whilst this conversation between the mother and daughter took place, Von Walden sat with the steward in his office. And the more he heard and the more he saw, the paler became his cheeks and more expressionless and vacant his eyes. With arms and legs crossed, he at last threw himself back in his chair, and exclaimed: "It would be just as well to send at once a bullet through my head, and it would take less time than to unravel all these matters."

The steward ventured now to hint at the sale of Malcolm's-Ness, and to mention the proposals that had been made for its purchase.

"Not a word, not a word of such a thing! The master of Malcolm's-Ness has some chance of credit, so as to stop up these deuced gaps, if he can only get time; but Lieutenant Walden, without this appendage, can do nothing."

"Everything would be managed, if Malcolm's-Ness were only turned into money," resumed the steward; "and there would then be a very pretty capital, which could be laid out on another estate; for example, on Brody, which, next spring, is to be sold."

"Say no more. That will never do; it must remain as it is, as long as it can. To begin with—however, let us see, what must be done first. Do you say, we really have no cash left?"

"Not one penny, as you will see, sir, by these books which I have laid before you. In the meantime—within six weeks—besides a number of lesser bills, two very considerable ones must be paid; it will be necessary, therefore, to come at once to a decision."

"Something must certainly be done, for on another side I am in a perplexity."

"No expedient is to be found, except the one proposed, since too many bonds have been given already for any loan to be raised sufficient to supply the deficiencies."

"I can discover a better plan myself. I see very plainly that it will not be sufficient; but, at least, it will stop the mouths of these cormorants for awhile. All my moveables must be sold off."

"That I am perfectly aware of. But how far will these go, since several of them are already under sequestration, and must be sold for the good of the creditors."

"My equipages, and carriages, and horses, shall also go."

"Yes, that is a matter of course."

"And my riding-horses as well; must I give this luxury up?"

"They are sold long ago, for the debt to ——."

"Well, then, let the cattle and farming stock, and the very seed for the ground, be put to the hammer; but not the place itself."

"And with what will the land be ploughed and sown?"

"Oh, time enough to think of that! For a year or two, I will get people to farm the land for half the crops, whilst I arrange my affairs. I am convinced that I can soon get myself out of the dilemma. Meantime, however, I must speak with a clever man of business. Send for Pellander."

A fortnight afterwards, it was the second Sunday after the return of the proprietors to their estate, a long advertisement was to be read on the church door, signed by Josias Pellander, to announce that, "on the premises at Malcolm's-Ness, a public auction would be held, at which, to all connoisseurs, the gold and silver plate, furniture, cattle, &c. &c., would be offered, with one month's instalment."

On the morning of this terrible day, Marie Louise shut herself up in her bedroom. Incessantly the frightful announcement sounded in her ear : incessantly did she see the pitying shrugs of her wealthy friends, which were as painful to think of as the cutting remarks that would fly from mouth to mouth in the little town. "Alas!" thought she, as she almost sunk under the torture that her pride endured this day, "not a single voice will pity me, without the addition of some contemptuous words."

"Yet there is one who will!" suggested a remembrance in her troubled mind; but to be pitied by him was rather a pain than a consolation.

"Take the matter coolly, my dear," said Von Walden, who, in spite of the entreaties of his mother-in-law that he would leave Marie Louise to herself, had penetrated to her quiet room; "in two years, our affairs will stand in as good a condition as when we left home; and as you are a woman of sense, you ought to have philosophy enough to see that two years of enjoyment, are worth two years of self-denial.

"Such sophistry cannot console me," answered Marie Louise.

"That is very unfortunate. I wanted to do my best to comfort and console you; for I thought it would be a satisfaction to a wife to know that at all events she had a husband who was no coward—for you have it to say, that at least your husband is greater than his destiny."

Marie Louise was silent.

"So let us talk reasonably together, my dearest; perhaps that will be better for you than my attempts at consolation. Have you seen after all the linen and bed furniture, so as to have it in order? If you have old table linen, let it be well mangled—which conceals the imperfection, so that it sells as well as new, according to Pellander."

"I will do what is necessary," sighed Marie Louise.

"That I am convinced of. Let all the stores, too, be brought out from the closets and cupboards; such things often fetch a great deal of money. They can be sold out there in the court-yard, where, after Pellander's wise counsel, brandy will be distributed to the country people."

"Alas!" said Marie Louise.

"My love, we must, during these two years of probation, set aside all unnecessary anxieties. Let us see therefore what is to be done besides. You will have these hangings taken down—in these times, one can do without silk bed-curtains and mahogany bedsteads. Can we not have the old painted four-post bedstead brought down from the garret, in which Papa Malcolm slumbered so sweetly when he returned from his oxen expeditions? The departed Malcolm could——"

"Ah, be silent, Walden."

"I beg of you, dear Marie Louise, to look upon my reminiscences as the best intentioned possible. It is as well, however, that you should furnish your bed-room at once, so that it may seem as if one set of things had been used instead of the other during the time of the auction—do you not think so yourself? As to the other rooms, they may as well remain as they are, since they can be easily inspected. The moveable articles can be carried, however, to the great saloon."

"Yes, yes; only leave me now in peace. I have Monday and Tuesday before me for these preparations."

"But that is but a short time for so much that has to be done; besides, to celebrate the last evening on which we can see guests here, I have invited a couple of old friends, who happen to be in the neighbourhood. They will help me to bear up under this trouble."

"You surely would not wish to play at cards this evening? No, you surely cannot wish that."

"Oh, why not? I can do it all the more quietly since I have not a couple of dollars to lose. In future, I must be content to chalk my scores."

"Which in their time will be debts which must be paid. Ah, Walden! will you never learn to put a restraint on yourself?"

"Whenever it is necessary I can always restrain myself. But I consider that it will be an honour to me if I can sit down to-day with as much presence of mind and pleasure to the card-table as I did two years ago."

"You would, perhaps, be able to play even on the day of the sale?"

"Yes, what else should I have to do? These gentlemen, too, who will stay all night, must be amused in some way or other, and a rubber is the least that we can offer them."

Marie Louise had heard enough. She pleaded that she had orders to give for the expected guests, and left the room.

* * * * *

The day appointed for the sale, and which had been looked forward to with painful anxiety, came at last. The first sound that awakened Marie Louise from a short slumber, was the rattling of Pellander's chaise over the stones of the court yard, and soon after was heard his voice, giving, in every direction, the necessary orders.

After a short but fervent prayer, Marie Louise left her couch, that was literally now the unpretending bed of her deceased uncle Malcolm, and after having again and again kissed her little son, and supplied him with all that she could think of to quiet and amuse him, she left him to the care of his nurse, and went to her mother's room. She received and returned her mother's affectionate embrace, but no tears came to her eyes, no lamentations passed her lips. "I must be strong to-day," she said, "otherwise I should despise myself. I have worked out my own destiny, and have no right to complain."

She entered the saloon; it was converted into one large warehouse of goods, and in the midst of piles of bedding, house linen, china, and household utensils of every description, was Pellander, with a roll of paper in one hand and a pen in the other, walking up and down.

"Your servant, your servant, my good lady! I am just now busy, in accordance with my duty, numbering all these things. A most unpleasant affair, it must be said! Upon my honour, I never expected anything of this kind when we met at the death-bed of my deceased patron, and I had the honour, as you will remember—but excuse me for speaking so freely."

"It matters not! I came here, however, because I have a little business to transact with Mr. Pellander."

"Much flattered by your confidence my good lady! About what may it be?"

"Among the gold ornaments——"

"Aha! my good lady," interrupted Pellander, as if he feared to hear more, "that will be impossible! It is my duty to see that not one of the things on my list is set aside, as I am answer-able for everything. Yet ladies cannot understand such matters, that is quite natural."

"Oh yes, I understand perfectly; but, Mr. Pellander, you have quite misunderstood my meaning. I wished to say only, that amongst these ornaments is a gold snuff-box; that one there with a large topaz on the lid. Be so good as to buy it in yourself, at the lowest price possible, as if you had received a commission for it. It is particularly valuable to me, because it came from a dear friend who is dead, and whose name is inscribed in it—and be assured that I will do all in my power to redeem it from you as soon as possible."

"My good lady, my good lady!—you must be well aware that it is my duty to let it go for the highest possible price. It is so beautiful and costly, that we shall get a great deal for it, and as to your request that I should advance the money, really——"

"Oh, my good Mr. Pellander, do not be so hard! I will, most assuredly, repay you—believe in my word!"

"I believe firmly in your good will, my lady, but I doubt much whether you will have money enough left to reclaim the box."

"Oh, indeed, I shall have still money from the produce of my garden and the sale of my milk! Call to mind the little service that my husband was so happy as to be able to do you, when you yourself were in difficulties."

"What was that?" asked Pellander, opening his eyes wide in astonishment. "When can that have occurred? Will you be so good, my lady, as to explain yourself more fully? Really I remember nothing of the kind—but something quite the reverse."

"Ah, it was only a trifle—I mean only the security for a bond."

"Most certainly a misunderstanding on your part, my lady; for I can say that, for at least fifteen years, my affairs have, thank God, through prudent management, been in such good order, that I have had neither to give bonds, nor make loans, but on the contrary, have been able, as was my duty, to assist others with my credit."

"Ah, now I remember," said Marie Louise, hesitating, as this fresh proof of the meanness of her husband gave a pang to her heart; "it must have been quite another person—excuse me. My head is sadly confused to-day."

"That is no wonder," said Pellander, as he proceeded with his business. "Number 245, 246——"

Marie Louise was about to leave the room, when Pellander's heart, touched by the sight of her quiet resignation, began to give away from the principle he had always maintained, of considering the interests of others after his own. "Listen, my good lady," said he, scratching with his pen behind his ear. "I will think of some plan about the snuff-box. Bless my soul! that I will; but it must remain in my possession until—you understand me, my good lady?"

"Perfectly, my good Mr. Pellander; with the greatest thankfulness I will, as soon as possible, pay my debt;" and after casting a look around upon all the things with which she was so familiarly acquainted, and which she had at one time considered as a lasting possession, she hastened away to seek, in the various household occupations which were connected with the day, a distraction to her thoughts.

Marie Louise, with her mother and child, had been invited to the house of one of her wealthy friends in the neighbourhood, during these days of hard trial; but she had preferred being present while the work of desolation was going on, and thus gradually to accustom herself to it, rather than to have to return home to an empty house. She had, however, perhaps, reckoned too much upon her strength, for the sound of the first blow of the hammer, as it resounded through the room into which she had retired, found a painful echo in her trembling heart. She sank into a chair and then rose again, as if ashamed of her weakness. Was it, then, anything more than the loss of some worldly goods which for four years only she had possessed? During her whole previous life had she not been acquainted with poverty and want? Why should she now tremble? Sacred ties, her child, her mother; her duties as a wife, all these remained, and all demanded that every querulous feeling, every nervous weakness, should be laid aside, and strength, both of body and mind, preserved for the three-fold obligations of the future.

A crowd of people from the town, or rather the whole of its *genteel* population, with the exception of the Utters and their household guest, were present at the auction. Each one congratulated himself that at last they were free to wander about as they liked, and to disperse themselves into every corner of the noble mansion, whilst they pinched each other's arms, and whispered to each other the most *piquant* observations about, for example, "Pride having a fall, and bringing always its own punishment," &c. &c., which remarks were all the more appropriate, since the pride imputed to the lady was evidently in no respects subdued, for instead of receiving their visits with the thankfulness which might have been expected, the lady of the house caused it to be announced that she could see no one. They did not fail, too, to call up many a remembrance of the time when the "beauty of the bow-window" had given herself the airs of a countess, and lived like a queen, which was but the old story of the "raven in borrowed plumes."

Many people also came from the surrounding country houses; and the noise and bustle, the heat and discomfort, were felt all over the house. Marie Louise with her child took refuge in the remote apartment which was occupied by her mother, where her husband soon found her out to whisper a few words in her ear: "May I beg of you, my dear," said the exemplary husband, "that you will have a little table set out for six—with cold meat, or whatever you happen to have—in the blue parlour? It is the only corner in the whole house where one does not run a chance of being deafened with the noise."

"And can you really think of quiet or comfort at such a moment? Are you quite without feeling?"

"Feelings, my dear, ought never to be shown, on such occasions, by people who know anything of life. Next month, perhaps, or even sooner, we may be going to an auction at the house of one of our friends, when their turn comes, to purchase furniture for ourselves again. Such things pass from hand to hand, and do not deserve that we should show any feeling about them."

"And when will you show feeling about anything?" asked Marie Louise, with tears in her eyes, which the levity of her husband, rather than her own troubles, drew from her.

"When? Oh, such an occasion may come yet; for instance, if I were to lose you. Then I would allow my feelings to master me, for I certainly should not be able to have command over myself."

Marie Louise was surprised at these words, which she had not expected, and returned the pressure of the hand which accompanied them with a feeling of gratitude. But the impression soon vanished, when Walden, as he went out at the door, repeated—"At nine o'clock, in the blue parlour, dear Marie Louise. You need not give yourself much trouble about it."

Mrs. N—— cast a stolen glance at her daughter. She saw that this scene had had no favourable effect on Marie Louise. "Think of your little one, and take courage for his sake," entreated the tender mother. "He will one day repay you for all your present trials, if you can only pass through them as praiseworthily as you have begun."

"Alas!" sighed Marie Louise, "perhaps he, too, will be one day the same."

"No. God is good. He hears your prayers and sees your sufferings, my poor child."

"But he is also just," answered Marie Louise, in a subdued voice, as she took her boy in her arms and pressed him close to her heart.

A thundering blow of the hammer, followed by Pellander's voice, broke the silence that ensued.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Now come the autumn hours,
The sun it flies,
The storm-winds rise,
And mine eyes weep
O'er mem'ry's faded flow'rs.
STAGNELIUS.

THE auction, with its bustle and painful discords, was over.

It was not the day of the sale, however, with all the disagreeable circumstances that we have described, which formed the worst part of this crisis in their fate. Painful days followed, in which, out of the dirty and disordered rooms, one thing after another was carried out; things with which the fondest remembrances were connected, handled by rough and indifferent hands, and thrown on to carts, and which, from behind window-curtains, were seen to drive away, to be unpacked again at the houses of persons as indifferent as their messengers. Yes, bitter were the days, when wandering through the great house, now empty and bare, the eye must seek out to find here and there a chair or a table, or an old sofa, which had been brought out from the lofts and lumber-rooms, and which now, like invalids, leaned for support against the deserted walls. To wander through these rooms, where the echo of their footsteps was heard; to sit down to a table furnished with coarse and ill-matched porcelain, and where a number of missing articles reminded them that it would be long before they were replaced;—all this belonged, it is true, only to the minor evils of their position, and ought, perhaps, scarcely to be mentioned with others so much more serious; but they were annoying, and served daily and hourly to recall to mind altered circumstances and changed fortunes.

Marie Louise was weary, and suffering both in mind and body; but she was determined to be strong, and she was so. With the duties of a mother and a wife to fulfil, she had shuddered at the thought of actual poverty, and how was she to behold it approach with giant strides. How she bore up beneath her burthen in hours of solitude, when alone the all-seeing eye was upon her, that no one knows; but before her family she maintained a calm exterior, and a more self-possessed manner than she had formerly shown; but no one ever saw a smile hover for a moment round her lips.

Von Walden, who for a couple of days endured the most painful trial that he knew upon earth—that of being left to solitude and his own company, said to his wife, on the third day: "As I see it is impossible for me to induce you to take a more cheerful view of life and its little daily events, I really believe, that were you to be left to yourself, your thoughts and feelings would be more calm; so that I am thinking of leaving you for a week or ten days—some friends of mine, besides, wish to see me."

"You would go from home, and leave us now?" said Marie Louise, painfully surprised, for this she had not expected.

"What can I do, my dear? You place too little value on my company for it to have any influence on your spirits; and as for me, you are well aware that I only like to see cheerful faces."

"Alas! can I look cheerful—can I forget all that has passed in the last few weeks? Can you expect that of me?"

"I expect nothing, my dear. Make this a principle yourself, too, and you will find life, altogether, pass more easily. But be of good cheer now, dear Marie Louise, and have the kindness to prepare me a little linen. I have fixed to set off at four o'clock."

"My good Walden, let me say to you, that it is high time to lay aside all levity, and, above all, this passion for play which has so ruined us. Alter your habits of life, I conjure you, in mine and your child's name, and for the sake of your own honour! Will you not dismiss the steward, and begin to look after your own concerns? You would then find a satisfactory and worthy occupation, and other amusements would become unnecessary."

"I have no doubt of that. But as I have no practical acquaintance with farming, the steward must remain until I have acquired it. This kind of knowledge, however, is not to be learned like a lesson; so there is nothing to prevent my being absent now and then."

Marie Louise sighed.

Von Walden left home. Not this time alone, but from time to time he made long journeys.

During the summer, the time passed almost tolerably pleasant; but autumn came. Long and stormy evenings came, and Marie Louise sat constantly alone with her mother and child, seeking a refuge from her gloomy and painful thoughts in household occupations, and the fulfilment of her duties. It became winter, and the snow lay deep in the great avenue which led up to Malcolm's-Ness. No sledges approached the house, no horses neighed, no bells rang; all was still as the grave. And more and more rare became the times when Von Walden returned for a couple of days, to give false and boastful accounts of the different ways that, in town and country, he had made efforts to improve their circumstances. On one occasion, he would relate that his prospects were so completely brightened, that he was on the point of receiving a very considerable sum of money; but the next time he came, an unforeseen event had prevented the development of his plans, so that they were, of course, for a time, deferred.

Long was it a mystery to Marie Louise, how, on these constant journeys, he contrived to live; as she very well knew that Pellander had left none of the proceeds of the sale in his hands. With horror, she at last discovered that he had sold the greater part of the grain which had been reserved for their winter provision; so that, by the new year, they would be without corn.

It would, however, be as useless as it would be wearisome, to follow, step by step, all the details of the circumstances which united in bringing about their total ruin.

After that Von Walden had for some time gone about professing to "arrange his affairs," and only entangling himself still more in the net from which it was impossible for him to extricate himself, his creditors had increased in number like locusts in the desert, and fell upon him now with relentless fury. For one year only after his return from their travels, Von Walden retained the name and dignity of possessor of Malcolm's-Ness; but at the end of this time he left it, in a manner which precluded the possibility of purchasing the smallest piece of land in exchange.

At a military station, which was about three miles distant from the handsome domain of Malcolm's-Ness, and deep in the forest, Von Walden got at last the lease of a small farm-house, with paddock and small potato ground.

A comfortless, ill-built, old-fashioned cottage, with slanting roof, small lattice-windows, and whitewashed walls, through which the autumn and winter wind found entrance at many a chink; one should have seen such a tenement, or rather lived in it for a month, the better to understand the feelings of Marie

Louise as she arrived one gloomy autumn evening at this home which had been provided for her.

A kind, but invisible friend, however, who was in communication with the person who had let the dwelling to them, had in secret arranged that its condition should be improved, in many respects, before the family came to take possession. A store of firewood was provided, and the peasants who were to be their neighbours, and from whom Von Walden had already procured many things on credit, did not display as much want of courtesy as they might have done.

The first sight of their new dwelling took from Marie Louise the last remains of courage that had supported her, as, with her mother and child, she left Malcolm's-Ness, and parted, as it would seem, with the last traces of all the comforts and luxuries of refined life.

Von Walden had left some days previous, to put things in order, and to be ready to receive them. As they entered what might be called the parlour, a feeling of chill dampness struck them, in spite of the fire that was burning in the smoky chimney. The only servant which they had retained, a faithful old woman, who had been sent to prepare for them, now received them with low curtsies, and with tears in her eyes, as she saw her beautiful mistress—her "lady baroness"—alight in the simple dress which she had now assumed, that the contrast might not be too striking.

"Where is my husband?" asked Marie Louise, as she busied herself in taking off her child's things, and looked into the fire—not having courage to look around her.

"Well, my good lady must not be angry," answered old Johanna, "but when my master, the lieutenant, came to see about the place, he got so restless that he could not be still a moment; so, 'Listen, Johanna,' said he, 'you see I can do nothing here, so I will just write a couple of lines to your lady, for I must go away on some important business;' and he wrote this and left me."

"That is right," said Marie Louise, suppressing with difficulty her tears. "Go, good Johanna, and get us a little tea ready. Make it right good and hot; and in the meantime I will get a little settled here."

Johanna went out, but could not forbear taking a look through the great key-hole after the door was shut. What did she see? She saw how her young mistress threw herself into her mother's arms, who pressed her in silence to her bosom, whilst the child falling over some unevenness in the floor, began to cry and call after its mamma.

"This is life!—this is poetry!" cried Marie Louise, with bitter irony, as she raised the child and quieted him with caresses. "Ah, mamma, my fate is now indeed decided. See here"—and she held the unopened note before the light of the fire—"can anything be imagined more frightful than this moment? To be forsaken by him to whom I sacrificed everything!"

"He is not worth your regrets or your sorrow, my child. But think now what I myself must have suffered, who foresaw all this, when you, dearest, my hope, my all, took the first step which led to this sad conclusion. Since then, I have always been prepared for the worst, and now I pray from my inmost soul that my Marie Louise may not sink under her trials—for then should I indeed be unhappy."

"No, mamma, I will not sink under them. I must not. But we will see what he writes," and she broke open the note.

"My dearest Marie Louise,—I hope that you will find that I have done everything that circumstances would allow, to provide for your comfort. I thought it my duty not to leave you at this painful moment without having given some assistance, which, perhaps, other men in their despair might have forgotten. Now, I feel that it is more than I can stand to receive you here. A meeting at this moment would only be painful to both; and to spare you this unpleasantness, I have chosen this time for settling a little business. I shall not be more than three days absent. Meantime, I wish you a good night's rest after your ride, my dear friend, and in the hope that I shall have given you satisfaction, I beg you to believe me,

"Your faithful

"WALDEN."

When Marie Louise had read the note she threw it into the flames, with an expression which left no doubt of the kind of impression it had made.

"You might have expected this from him, my child, and have no reason to be surprised at it."

"I am not surprised," answered Marie Louise, in a tone unnaturally calm; "I should only like to know how it will all end."

"God disposes all—let this thought calm your fears, and turn to Him! But we will now see a little how we can best arrange ourselves here. See, my love, it is altogether better than we might have expected from the description. The walls are a bright cheerful colour, are they not?"

"And this furniture which used to stand in the steward's room, looks quite grand; almost too elegant for our new parlour—or stay, how ought we to call it?—our saloon, drawing-room. or reception-room?"

"Not this tone, Marie Louise," said her mother, reproachfully; "whom the Lord chasteneth, should be lowly in heart. We will call this room the parlour, as our predecessors have done, nd as our best things stand here, we will consider it our best room, in which we may pass our time, at least in peace, so long as we have peace in our own consciences."

Marie Louise pressed gently her mother's hand, "Ah !" sighed she, "when shall I ever be like mamma ?"

"When God has tried thee enough, my child !"

Whilst this was going on in the parlour, Johanna was without in her little room, from which a door led into the bed-room, (the cottage contained three rooms besides that of Johanna), and she blew the fire under the slowly boiling tea-kettle. Whilst she was so occupied, the latch of the opposite door was gently raised, and a voice whispered from the opening : "Johanna, are they still in the parlour ?"

"Yes, come in ! If they should come, we shall hear them well enough ; but they were so full of trouble, that they are not likely to be in a hurry."

"Indeed—they were in great trouble—that I can well believe !" A man, wrapped in a mantle, stepped softly in. "I only want just to take a look, to see that all is right." And he—we know well who it was—opened the door to the sleeping apartment, where a fire was burning, and threw its light upon a well supplied tea-table, which stood before a convenient little sofa. This had been provided by one of the lieutenant's new neighbours, who had received a commission from him to purchase it, together with the six chairs to match, which Von Walden had eagerly taken from him, with the promise that they should be paid for in six months. These were to be as unexpected a surprise to his wife as the desk, the work-table, and toilette-glass, which he had procured from other people in the same manner. The tea-service, however, which had formerly belonged to them at Malcolm's-Ness, had been brought after the departure of the lieutenant, and Johanna had been instructed to give her young mistress a hint that it had come from one of the gentlemen's houses in the neighbourhood.

The person who had done this in secret, now entered the room quietly, and lighting the candle which stood on the table, cast a furtive look around him, and unperceived by Johanna, laid something wrapped in paper on the dressing-table. But at this moment the door opened of the room between the parlour and bed-room, and Williamson (for it was he) heard the voice of Mrs. N——, saying: "Dear me, I shall be quite comfortable here, my child—I never should have expected that Walden would have thought of me."

"That he certainly would not have done," thought Williamson, and retreated quickly into the outer room, where he made a sign of farewell to his secret confidante, the old Johanna, who, during the absence of Von Walden and Marie Louise, had, at his recommendation, gone into the service of Mrs. N——.

"Good heavens! what does this mean?" cried Marie Louise, as she entered the bed-room, and with a sort of vague and tender foreboding seemed as if she felt the influence of a sympathizing spirit. "See, mamma; if this is Walden's doing, and it cannot be any one else, I ought to be very, very thankful. I never expected to see again such a comfortable sofa, and these flowers, that I was always so fond of!" and as she bent over them, a tear fell into the corolla of the finest of them. The heart of Marie Louise could not be mistaken.

Mrs. N—— did not doubt for a second; but when Johanna came in soon after, and related, with glistening eyes, that the lieutenant had purchased all these things, with the exception of the tea-service, which she thought came from Wallby, in order to give pleasure to her mistress, the two ladies thought it more wonderful than ever, and the surprise and talk that it excited caused them to feel less bitterly that first impression.

The tea tasted so good out of the old well-known cups! Marie Louise, whose spirits rose in a manner to her quite unaccountable, began to discuss with her mother their future manner of life, and to talk of the work which she meant to undertake; declaring that, even in poverty, they might be happy, if Walden would but remain at home, and conquer his old propensity for play, which now he would at least have no materials for.

The first evening in their new home thus passed better than they could have ventured to hope, and it was only after having parted with her mother, and put her child to rest, that Marie Louise perceived the little packet on her dressing table. Without suspecting the nature of its contents she unfolded the paper; but she started as she found within it the valuable present and keepsake of the Baroness Charlotte—the gold snuff-box which she had commissioned Pellander to purchase at the sale, but which she had never been able to redeem. She lifted up the lid and found within it the following note:

"Respected lady!—In consideration for the sad occurrences which have lately taken place, and by which your heart must be much grieved, I take the liberty, as your devoted servant and friend, to remind you of a little transaction which took place between us. The very beautiful and sensible behaviour which you showed, my good lady, on an occasion that I need not mention, inspired me with the greatest respect for your ladyship's disposition and reason, which feeling has since been so strengthened, that as a proof that we advocates have also a sense like others of what is good and right, I do myself the honour of sending the accompanying box as a present, as well as a token of my gratitude for the confidence with which your ladyship honoured me on a certain occasion.

"With much respect,
"Your obedient Servant,
"JOSIAS PELLANDER."

"Ah, my foreboding, my foreboding," said Marie Louise to herself, as she pressed the recovered treasure, now dearer than ever, to her lips. There was but one person who could have brought it here: for the letter, what could that mean? It was merely a subterfuge to conceal the real donor. And he who had done this, had also understood how to contrive all the rest so delicately, that she should only have her husband to thank for it. Oh, there was something so strange in the thought, that he who had once been so near her heart, had now thought of her, and cared and watched over her well-being and comfort—this she had never deserved! But it was also a sweet feeling, for Marie Louise was certain that he who had in secret shown so much foresight and care, and had also displayed so much delicacy, would never for a moment cause her uneasiness; and yet while he would not seek to come in personal contact with her, she felt sure he would never quite lose sight of her.

This conviction inspired her with courage, and enabled her to put forth all her strength to bear the destiny which she had brought on herself. Far from dwelling on the remembrance of Williamson with any feelings that were at variance with her duty as a wife, she now thought of him in a point of view, that gave peace rather than disquietude to her heart.

The power of a passion, such as she had formerly felt, lay bound beneath the hard and constant burden of household cares, and the thoughts of Marie Louise on him, who, in former times had been so dear to her, and who still was so, were so pure, that she now would have seen and spoken to him without an embarrassed feeling, without agitation or disquiet, if she had not feared to make herself the object of slander. Her fame was now the only thing left her, and must therefore be more than ever carefully preserved.

* * * * * *

After the lapse of a week, Von Walden came back from a large market which had been held in the neighbourhood, where he had, as he called it, "arranged his affairs," and bringing with him, it is true, a sum of money that he had persuaded Pellander to give him out of the little that remained from the sale of Malcolm's-Ness. And although he presented a sad, and, in every respect, pitiful appearance, he was received by Marie Louise with cheerfulness, and even with pleasure, and he was full of self-satisfaction, as she thanked him for all the attentions that he had surprised her with on her arrival.

"Yes, it is my way to mix up good with bad," said he; and wet and dirty as he was—for now his only equipage was a post cart—he threw himself at full length upon the nice sofa; "you, my dear," continued he, "parted from me with a gloomy face, when I came here to put things in order, and I was determined to brighten it up again—that was all."

"And you were able to purchase all these things, my good Walden? I cannot understand——"

"Able to purchase them? Such trifles, my dear! I had long before described and ordered them; but I did not want to tell my little secret until you came here. By and by, when I have settled all my affairs, which, I have every reason to think, will be very soon, you will see that I shall also get furniture for the child's room. But what have you to give me to eat? I am as hungry as a wolf; for, between ourselves, I had not anything in my pocket to-day, to get anything with. I had, to be sure, a little money, that I got from Pellander, out of our remaining effects; but I met with a poor wretch, who was worse off than myself, and could not resist giving him my last farthing."

"My poor Walden!"

"No lamentations, my dear. A man ought to know how to suit himself to bad as well as fine weather. If it rain good luck, he may put away his umbrella, and let it beat in his face; but if misfortunes come down, he seizes it again, and takes care that they do not come through; but when he is tired of carrying it, he may let it fall in the mud, and tread it under foot.

Such a man am I—but something to eat, something to eat; that is the principal thing."

And that was, truly, always the principal thing, when Walden was at home. But who can tell how he managed to live whilst he was absent, which was constantly the case. It was, at first, beyond the power of Marie Louise to solve this riddle; and all her entreaties that he would confide in her, had as little effect as her representations of the necessity for his remaining at home. But, at last, many reports came to her ears, which bitterly pained the feelings of the unhappy wife. It was said that Lieutenant von Walden not merely frequented the most disreputable houses, where nothing but card-playing and spirit-drinking went on, but that he associated with the worst kind of company, now that he could no longer play with his old friends.

The mortification which he felt at this separation from his old comrades, and perhaps, also, the knowledge of the misery into which he had thrown his family, was followed by the indulgence of a new and as powerful a propensity as that of gaming; and before six months were over, Von Walden, who a few years before had been admired and sought for, was not only dismissed from his regiment, but was looked upon as for ever lost to society. Besotted and disfigured, and half-stupified by his debauched habits, he retained sufficient capacity only to incur debts at the cost of his few remaining resources.

One day, as Marie Louise, in tears, was endeavouring to calm to sleep her little son, who, ill and restless, filled her ear and heart with its faint moans, she heard, with surprise, the strange footsteps of a man before her window. In raising her head, she perceived a man in a blue coat and white buttons, a costume that she knew belonged to officers of justice. She had before seen such a person in the neighbourhood of the cottage, and had felt a foreboding of the meaning of his presence. Shuddering at the thought that she might have to find herself still more miserable, she arose and opened the door. Her foreboding heart had not deceived her; it was indeed a bailiff, who, followed by two constables, came to put a distraint upon the whole of the little property which was left them.

"It is impossible," said Marie Louise; "it must be a mistake!"

"I would it were so," answered the officer, compassionately. "But, see you, this paper speaks very plainly. These things here must all be sold by auction."

And it really came to this, for it was spring, and Marie Louise's guardian angel was absent! and was not aware of these late proceedings of Von Walden, which were all the more unexpected, from Williamson having only a short time before, through Pellander, extricated him from some pressing difficulties, and could not anticipate so soon any more such dilemmas.

Another change came.

Von Walden's health could no longer resist the many inroads made upon it by his intemperance. He became seriously ill, and was confined for some time to his bed.

This epoch was the heaviest and hardest to bear that Marie had yet experienced in her life, when, for the second time, the costly present of two friends was obliged to be disposed of, not only for the comforts required for the sick bed, but in order to buy bread for her family; for now it became impossible to attempt to employ herself in working for strangers. Her good mother, whom God had spared to her as a support and consolation in her sorrow, was too weak and sickly to assist her in her attendance through long nights of anguish by the side of the sick bed—nights in which she had time to remember her former conception of the height of misery. Formerly had she prophesied: "A hut in the country, reduced circumstances, want, poverty, and love grown cold——" Alas! this picture of wretchedness was light, compared to that which was now before her. Marie Louise had forgotten to include in it a sick husband in a fever, who now cursed and sang, now cried and laughed, and a child, an only and beloved child, who, long ailing, was now laid upon its bed of suffering.

In Marie Louise's crushed heart was, as we have already noticed, no room left for the storm of earthly passion. With delight would she, in these nights, have bent her knees in thankfulness to have had a being near her who, understanding and sympathizing in her sorrow, would have helped her to bear its burthen—yes, were it even Williamson, Williamson as friend and brother! "Oh, would to God that he were come!"

But he came not; he was far away; and to strangers she could not apply for pity, help, and love.

It was one night towards the end of summer, a gloomy and rainy night, but still a summer's night, with its mysterious half-darkness. In one bed lay Walden, with face red and swollen, in wild delirium, which turned ever upon his old favourite subject and habit. He lost and won, and spoke with himself in such a manner as to excite as much horror as pity in those who heard him. Marie Louise, still dressed, sat with her child in her arms on her own bed, and, drowsy, and unable any longer to keep awake, her head had sunk upon the pillow. The old Johanna sat nodding on a stool at the fire-side.

Marie Louise dreamed. She was so happy, and, beyond all description, so blessed! It seemed to her as if she was busied in adorning herself with ornaments, and that she knew that the child, for whom her heart had so often beat, and for whom she had heaved so many a sigh, and wept so many hot tears, was now raised above all earthly sorrow. Then, starting from her sleep, her first thought on waking was, "My God! my God! can this dream be already true? Can God have taken him from me as I slept?" and in anguish she listened for his faint breathing. Oh! only a mother can so listen, can so strain the sense of hearing! Her heart was ready to break with despair, until the boy softly whispered: "Mamma!" What sweet influence lay in that single word! Again was the light and peace of blessedness in the heart of the young mother. How great, how merciful, how good is God! He had designed to show her what a frightful fate might still await her. In unspeakable thankfulness, she cast her eyes to heaven, and pressed the child to her heart.

Strengthened by the short slumber which she had had, and the mystical influence which the past hour had shed, Marie Louise arose, and with her light burthen in her arms, went to watch by the bed of her husband. Walden's fantasies were at last quieted by the effect of a composing draught that he had taken, and he now lay in a deep sleep. For some moments Marie Louise stood in silent prayer for them all; then, sitting down by the window, began to sing the favourite cradle-song of her child, with which he was so quickly sent to sleep.

The sun began gradually to gild the tops of the forest trees; the morning light came into the room, and as Marie Louise contemplated the pale and emaciated features of the being to whom she had given life, and who was soon to enter on a truer life, she felt that her heart needed strength. She not only felt it, but she said to herself, "God's will be done!" And yet it seemed as if the last chord of the poor mother's heart must break, as the child suddenly, and in an unusual and strange manner, began to stretch out its arms. She did not understand the movement, but she foreboded something frightful, and waking Johanna and her mother with her cry of alarm, they soon stood by her side, to share in her fears.

"See, dearest mamma! how his colour is changed! How his little hand is clenched! My child, my child, answer me, speak to me!"

The little one gave no answer; he endeavoured to articulate the one sweet word that he had learnt, the word mamma! but it died on his pale lips. His eyes were raised to cast one more look of love upon his mother, before the return of the fit extinguished the last faint spark of life.

Now shone the sun high in the heavens, and cast its rosy light over the pale and motionless mother, and over the pale child which lay on her bosom, and, shaded by her long tresses, slept the sleep of peace. A light wind murmured through the branches of the trees. The blackbird warbled its morning song before the window. The old mother lay on her knees in prayer to God.

The husband raised himself up in bed. He rubbed his eyes, and contemplated with a fixed gaze the scene before him, then, becoming gradually enlightened by the light of consciousness, he clasped his hands and hid his face; but he could not hide himself from before his stricken conscience.

CHAPTER XXV.

Where is peace?
There where our spirits rest
From time and space.
LING.

AGAIN weeks passed away upon the flood of time. Soon had Marie Louise learnt to perceive that her dream on that eventful night had been a messenger of peace, to prepare her mind for the shock it was to sustain, and now that she knew that her child was removed from all suffering, and safe from all storms, and was conscious that she had fulfilled as far as possible all the duties of a mother, she devoted herself with redoubled zeal to those which remained to her.

Walden's condition, after being long precarious, began at last to improve; and during this time Marie Louise unceasingly exerted all her tenderness and loving persuasion to lead him back to a better life, and whole hours would she talk with him, and exert every power of eloquence with this holy motive.

"You are well now," said she, laying her own kindly upon his emaciated hand, "and I need no longer, alas! devote so much of my time to my duties as a mother; I can work with double industry, and have strength for it. We could rent a part of the land belonging to this place, and with a couple of day labourers easily cultivate it, and you would see that God would bless our undertaking, and let his sun again smile upon us."

Walden shook his head with a doubting expression. He could no longer build airy castles; the time, too, for levity and boasting was over, but with it had gone all energy of mind to bring forth better fruit. He was spiritless and dejected, inwardly dead to all interests and feelings, although the body was reviving.

"Only answer me, dear friend! I should be so glad, so happy, if my proposed plan were to cheer you. What is all the past, but a course of trial that God thought fit to send us? It is now at an end; I feel it in the freedom with which I breathe again, and in my health, which in spite of all my trials is still good."

Whilst Marie Louise endeavoured thus to console her husband, she was plying the needle dexterously and unweariedly as formerly, upon fine linen and muslin, that she embroidered for a rich farmer's wife in the neighbourhood.

"You are very good, as you have always been," sighed he; "but neither now nor ever have I deserved your care. I was a wretch!—do you understand me?—a wretch! Ha! you do not know what it is to be constantly pursued by the remembrance of one's errors, and thrown back upon one's fancies. I am better, it is true; but no more happiness for me!"

"Oh, yes, my dear beloved friend! much happiness is in store for you. These tears upon my cheek are tears of joy. I have no more tears for sorrow, since you have spoken these words."

"My poor wife! this is only a delusion."

"No, by Heavens, it is not! I am now happier than I was in the time of our most brilliant prosperity. You are now, I feel convinced, cured of your unfortunate passion; and now you must only recover your spirits, which will come when the strength of health will give you elasticity enough to chase away all gloomy fancies. Then all troubles will be over. We are both young, and we can enter upon a new career of activity. If my proposed scheme does not please you, we could remove to one of the larger towns, where you could give instruction in languages or music, and I could have pupils to learn fancy-work. You will always find in me, Walden, an encouraging companion. We will support and console each other; and, in want, learn better to know each other's hearts than before, in time of superfluity."

So did she speak with him, and so seek to encourage herself and him. Her noble efforts ought, indeed, to have been crowned with success.

With the return of autumn, Marie Louise began to feel the influence of the invisible presence of a long-missed friend. Many of the circumstances around her were improved; but the great aim for which she lived and laboured—the endeavour to restore Walden to himself and to his duties—was not accomplished. His dejection increased, in spite of all her efforts to chase it away; and now that he had again left his bed, he spent many hours of the day in wandering about, principally in the depth of the forest, where he felt most secure of being unobserved. But the constant anxiety of his wife would not permit her to leave him to himself. With inexpressibly tender words she reproached him for his cruelty in leaving her a prey to these fears.

"I intreat you, Marie Louise," he answered one day, with a wildness which yet had the expression of an earnest request, "leave me in peace, and cease these eternal entreaties and arguments. Look upon me as lost for ever, and leave me to my fate."

"Impossible! How can you desire that? You will yet return to yourself again."

"Never! Look at me well, my wife—look at this emaciated body, these sunken eyes, this thin hair, that is scarce sufficient to cover my head, in which so many idle thoughts have hovered; look at the dashing Lieutenant von Walden of former days in this shabby coat, his only coat, that he has not even a right to wear, and whose gold-braid is as tarnished as its owner's reputation;—and I ask you, Marie Louise, if you can believe that he who has experienced humiliations of a thousand kinds,—who has seen how old comrades have turned away their heads, as if they did not see him, because they must not greet him,—do you believe that he—this man who has disgraced himself by indulging his bad passions at the worst and lowest places—that he can return to a new life of useful activity? He cannot do it!"

"Yes, my dear husband, he can—and it would be the greatest of all victories. Then you would be more esteemed and honoured than you have ever been."

"I am too weak!"

"This weakness can be overcome; for at this moment, when you are forsaken by the whole world, and whenever your own heart is deserting you, one friend is left to you, who ought to be more to you than all else that you have lost; and love, and prayers, and God himself will stand by you as supports against your weakness."

"Ah! tease me no more! Your love causes me more sorrow than all the rest—I beg of you, give up this attempt, it leads to nothing—let me go!"

And he went out as usual, and only when in the forest began to breathe with freedom. Then he would sit down and listen to the rushing of the stream, which echoed the noisy tumults in his own soul; or he would force his way through the gloomy fir thickets, and penetrate far into their recesses until he found a spot lonely enough to give utterance to the voice of the troubled spirit within, which left him neither peace nor repose.

A thousand times in these lonely hours the thought of self-destruction would pass through his mind, as the only means of relief from all his sorrows; but the remembrance that he at least could spare his wife this shock—the most terrible of all—restrained his hand. Another, and perhaps a still more powerful influence restrained him. Von Walden's religious feelings had been awakened; he had looked, as it were, behind the curtain which hangs between time and eternity.

Marie Louise had at last guessed the subject of his gloomiest thoughts, and she suspected that only a tender regard for her had enabled him to struggle against it. And she trembled before the frightful possibility that this love might lose its power over his soul, and leave him a prey to the godless desire.

But the tragedy was hastening to its last act.

* * * * * *

The short winter-day was drawing to a close. Marie Louise turned her spinning-wheel industriously, for since her embroidery no longer found a sale, she had had recourse to spinning. The old Johanna had just made up her fire, and Mrs. N—— sat knitting in silence, which was long unbroken.

"How long he stays out to-day! My poor Walden!" said at last Marie Louise, as she looked up at her mother. "What do you think, mamma—must not something have happened?"

"Oh no, my dear child, do not make yourself uneasy. He scarcely ever comes home earlier that this, and yet he is sure to come."

"Yes, thank God, he always does," repeated the poor wife, to comfort herself and allay the anxiety which she could not help feeling. Yet had she not often had such forebodings and fears without any misfortune happening? She ought not this time to give way to faintheartedness.

"Is it very dark out of doors, Johanna?" asked she of the faithful old servant, who was working in the same room.

"Oh, it is not so very dark, dear lady. The moon shines a little, and by and by it will be brighter."

Again there was silence for awhile.

"Good God, mamma, I am so uneasy. It has already struck five o'clock. He never staid out so late before. How hungry he must be."

"You are distressing yourself quite needlessly, my Marie Louise. This constant anticipation of misfortune, which your imagination so easily suggests, is an unfortunate habit, which prevents your enjoying a minute's ease. Exert your reason, my child."

"Have I not reason to be uneasy, my dear mother?"

"Not that I know—he has been out late before; and he will soon be here, I feel sure within myself."

"And I feel also sure within myself of something unusual, something dreadful, that I cannot understand nor control. But, good heavens! what was that light before the window? Did you not see it, mamma?"

"My dear child, you are really foolish. You will become quite superstitious. That was only the light of the fire on the glass—you are frightening yourself."

"Do you, then, not hear something, mamma? There is some one knocking at the door. What can it be? Hark, that is not Walden's hand. But yet, perhaps—who could it be? Make haste, dear Johanna, with the supper, that he may have something warm; that will do him good. He cannot, perhaps, find the latch, so hasten with the light and open the door. There is knocking again at the door. It is a stranger. It is not Walden. Oh God! I knew it well!"

Johanna hastened to the outer door.

Marie Louise could not from fear move from the spot, nor call her servant back again to say that all was now still without.

Mrs. N——, not much less alarmed than her daughter, tried to compose herself. "My dear child, what is there to fear? Even if it should be a stranger, why should that alarm you?"

Marie Louise made a sign with her hand that her mother should listen. There was a whispering in Johanna's kitchen.

"I will go out," said Mrs. N——.

Marie Louise, in her agony, held her fast. A couple of painful minutes passed. But it became impossible to wait any longer; and overcoming by an effort the sort of paralysis of fear which prevented her moving her limbs, she tottered towards the door, and suddenly opened it.

Prepared for the worst, she saw only before her one of their neighbours, a good honest peasant, who seemed to be consulting with Johanna.

"My dear, good lady," said the man, "there is no time for delay, so I must tell you without any preamble, that I and one of my comrades, as we were bringing home wood to-day, have found Mr. Lieutenant, God knows, more dead than alive. It was dark, you see, and as he was leaving the forest, and had gone a little away from the path, he had fallen into the stone quarry near Arstapen. We heard him call, and soon found out where he was. But so injured was he with the stones that had fallen upon him, that we could not immediately carry him——"

"Where is he? Where is he, then?" stammered out Marie Louise, deadly pale, and about to go out.

"Be easy, be easy, good lady! He will soon be here. He begged us to bring him here, as soon as he came a little to himself in our hut."

A couple of hours afterwards, when Walden had been brought home, and the doctor, who lived near, had been sent for, and had seen him, the latter said to Marie Louise, who had again recovered her self-possession, and was sitting by her husband's bed, watching him tenderly: "My good lady, I should only be deluding you with false hopes, if I said there was anything to be done in this case. Yet towards morning, if I am not deceived, he will return to consciousness again."

The doctor did not deceive himself.

Once again did a sparkle of life kindle in Walden's eyes and soul, although but feebly. "My breast, my head!" said he, faintly; "I thought it was only a bad dream, but now I feel it is a plain reality——God be thanked! all will now soon be over."

Seizing the hand of her husband, over which her tears streamed, Marie Louise said, with a deep and trembling voice: "No, my beloved husband, do not speak so! Have you remembered—have you taken thought on—" he understood her questioning look.

"Yes, I have thought; I have had time to think since my long illness, and since that night when, you will remember, I awoke and saw you with our dead child upon your lap. From that hour I have been changed, and have indeed taken thought, or there would have been long ago an end of me. I will have no secrets from you now. I have been often, often tempted to destroy myself; but when I thought on the trouble it would heap upon you—you to whom I had already caused so much,—my soul in this hour of temptation sought the Saviour whom I had so long forgotten. I found him, and he was more merciful to me then I deserved. But death was my great desire. It has come at last, and you, my Marie Louise, may now again be happy!"

Sobbing, Marie Louise bent over her husband, and sank upon her knees. She had no words for her emotion.

"If I was only not tortured by the remembrance," continued he, "that you, who were so happy in the possession of everything, that you gave up so confidingly—that, through me, you have been brought step by step to the lowest want."

"Oh, my beloved husband, I have no right to complain, I enjoyed with you all that riches could give—ought I not to be content to share poverty also with you? Dear husband, forget all that—or, if you cannot, take at least my inmost forgiveness—all—all is atoned for! And forgive me, also, if out of thoughtlessness I have ever grieved you."

These words seemed to fall with healing power on Walden's heart. He tried to thank her with a pressure of the hand, but could only express his gratitude with a look of love.

"Perhaps," said Marie Louise, with an inquiring glance, "perhaps you would like to see ——"

"No, it is not necessary; in the few minutes which are left to me, no one could make me better than I am. I believe, and let it be your comfort and consolation, that, in dying, I believe, and feel that even I may look for mercy. I have suffered a heavy punishment here below; but I can say no more, and I have said enough! Lay thy lips on mine, so that I may still feel thee near. Oh, that is sweet! And you have really forgiven me? You good one! Beg thy mother to forgive me too. I was thoughtless, my Marie Louise, but not quite bad. You saw through this, and had love enough to be willing to spend a whole life with me—if I could have become another man!"

"Oh, then I should have been blest!"

"But it is better as it is. Now my affairs are arranged, at last, in the best way," and here a faint smile played on his lips; "but it gets darker and darker before my eyes. Marie Louise, my tender, true, beloved wife, farewell! farewell! I die blessing thee."

And in a few minutes more all was over.

Marie Louise was a widow.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Upright they sit,
They council hold,
The good old dames.
SILFVERSTOLPE.

"THE Lord's will be done; what he does is ever for the best," said Mistress Utter, as she pushed away her coffee cup, and folded the letter up, in which the mother of Marie Louise announced the sad event which had ended her married life, and at the same time asked the advice of her old friend, with regard to their embarrassed circumstances.

"Yes, indeed, who can tell what would be the wisest thing to do?" said the old counsellor, and at the same time knocked the ashes out of his pipe so carelessly that some of them flew into the sugar basin: "Who knows what would be the wisest thing to do, mother?"

"Take care of the sugar, father, and let us say nothing until we read this letter from William, here. I think he has been long enough away at that place, where he was born; and it is high time he came home to look after the office. If I did not go in and out occasionally, there is no knowing what those fine gentlemen—— "

"Oh! you are a most excellent body, mother, you look after everything. You understand even surveying business, and can keep these young men in order. But pour me out another cup. As this is Sunday afternoon, you ought to be liberal, mother; I will then read this letter of your favourite aloud."

The old woman smirked, and the old man began:—

"My dear good Aunt Gretchen!—I have now enjoyed as much happiness as I can hope for in this life. I have sat in my old mother's easy chair, and with feelings that she alone could awake in her beloved son have I read her remarks, written with her own hand on the fly leaves of her Bible; I sat there whole hours, and saw her old transparent face, with the pictures that were my delight as a child. Aunt Gretchen! I have even had a pinch of snuff out of her large old silver snuff-box, with the portrait of Gustavus III. on the lid. I have seen my friend, the friend of my youth, in his house that once belonged to my own parents. I have seen him happy with a good, dear, domestic wife, who is as simple and unpretending as the people around her. I was happy to find my old home become again the abode of happiness. And yet, with all this, I long to return again to the place that I now and for ever call my home. I long to see Aunt Gretchen—such coffee as hers even Augusta cannot make, and such good order in a bachelor's household no one but herself can preserve. I long to see my good old uncle, my respected friend, planting his flowers, as beautiful and luxuriant as Noah's vine; and in spite of the efforts which they make to detain me here, I shall return in about a fortnight after the arrival of this letter. My good Aunt Gretchen, make no preparations for me in my new house. You know that it has been an amusement to me whilst building and arranging it; but now the pleasure is over, and I am determined never to live anywhere but in my old apartments, my dear little bow-windowed room. Say nothing more on the subject. It may seem foolish to build a great house, and then to go on living in the house of other people—but let me have my way. I think of letting my own. And now no more. I am in a hurry, since I must go to a ball to-night, and whirl about with the young girls of the town. Who knows what may happen—but this is a stupid joke; Aunt Gretchen knows well that she is the only mistress that her little engineer will ever have over his house and heart.

"Greetings to my uncle, from

"Your faithful

"WILLIAM WILLIAMSON."

"Yes, God bless my little engineer!" said the old lady, as she put the corner of her handkerchief to her eyes; "he is as good as gold, and we will have many a pinch of snuff together, though he is not such a good hand as I am at that art. As to his rooms, he must have his own way about it, although it is rather dull to live here where he has so little room for all his goods and chattels."

"He finds no one who makes him so comfortable as you, mother, that is the whole secret," said the old man.

"I very much doubt if that is the whole secret, father, for it is not so far, thank goodness, to the new house, but what I could keep everything in order for him—and have I not done it already for some time, though he fancied it was never so comfortable as the old accustomed place? I know no one in the town who has a handsomer house, or more beautiful furniture; for really they were as good as new when he bought them at the Malcolm's-Ness auction, and they have come to no harm here, for he only goes and looks at them, and I dust them, and air them constantly."

"Yes, indeed," said the counsellor, "you have really arranged everything there very elegant; but I do not exactly like it all, for one is like a stranger in one's own house, when one walks about such large rooms. He would have done better to nail some of them up."

"Ah, old man, young people have other notions and tastes to us. Those who belong to the world, want plenty of room, and we who keep out of it require very little. However, there are a couple of lovely rooms there; those which I call the wing-rooms; and these poor William loves with all his heart—yes, yes, I know well why he likes them so much."

"I know that too," rejoined the counsellor; "one of them looks into the new garden, that he, or rather I have laid out, since I have had a good share in it. And compared to that, the splendour in-doors is all nonsense to the flower-beds, grass-plats and espaliers, that I have produced. The apple, cherry, and plum trees that I have grafted for him, I will not say anything about; but I think the planting does me credit, mother."

"That it does, husband! But I do not think it is your flowers that make the room so dear to him. His liking has quite another foundation."

"I am quite curious to know what."

"But you shall not hear; only I rather think, that as the other wing-room looks to the street at the side of our house, he can see many things from it that he is accustomed to look at."

"Ah, you are very sharp-sighted, mother; just as you women are in general. But let us now say a word about the other, mother—shall we think about whether we could not let a couple of rooms to these poor ladies? From the letter of our old neighbour, one can see well, that they dread spending the winter in such solitude in that ugly place, and no one can be surprised at that. I really think that the people of the town have forgotten their affront at not being received on the day of the auction. I wish to believe it, but I am not certain."

"Oh, they will soon be reconciled," said Mistress Utter. "Lisa, my child, take away the coffee, and bring me my fur—my muff and tippet."

"Are you going out, mother?"

"Yes, I will talk a little with the burgomaster's wife, and see what tune the bells play; for if I cannot succeed in arranging matters, so that they shall be well received, I shall advise them not to come here. Marie Louise, poor little thing, has had grief enough, and ought not now to have to find out that she is despised in the place that was formerly her home, and that people turn their backs upon her."

"Let any one dare to do that to my beautiful young lady of the bow-window," replied the counsellor. "If she has no other protector, I will become one to her."

"That is right and good, father! But we cannot alone protect and defend her. She will want a hearty greeting, and the promise of work. For if she is merely to come and sit all alone in her room, and pass her time looking to see how politely people bend their necks as they pass, she had better stay where she is—but let me manage the matter; I will soon set it to rights. Lisa, never mind the fur—it is now warm enough without it, but bring the looking-glass and the pomade pot, and my cap with a brown ribbon."

After a hasty toilette, Mistress Utter repaired to the burgomaster's wife, with whom, quite accidentally, as the old lady had reckoned on, three other ladies were sitting—viz., the postmaster's wife, the doctor's wife, and the young wife of the clergyman.

"Hey day, Mistress Utter! What wind blows you here?" exclaimed the burgomaster's wife, advancing to meet her welcome guest.

"Yes, indeed," answered the old lady; "it blows some particular wind always, when I go visiting. It is quite charming, ladies, that I should happen to meet you all here."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the postmaster's wife, and the burgomaster's wife, both in one breath; whilst the doctor's wife and the parson's wife were too young to express their curiosity aloud, but contented themselves with looking significantly at each other.

"Well, then—but, first, may I take off my things?"

All hands were eagerly offered to assist the welcome bringer of a piece of news, and in a few minutes she sat on the sofa between the two elder ladies.

"Have you not heard of any fatal accident?"

"No! Bless us, what can have happened?" and they began to guess the names of a number of persons who were either ill, or about to die, or who ought to die, in order to leave some expected office vacant.

"Nothing of that kind, my ladies. The person who has departed, has long ceased to be a member of our society, although he once belonged to this town."

A universal "Aha!" accompanied by an expressive gesture, seemed to announce that they were on the right scent.

"The individual can be no other," said the postmaster's wife, "than the crazy lieutenant, who, some years ago, married that proud young thing who lived opposite you in the bow-windowed room. Is he not?"

The postmaster's wife thought fit to have forgotten that the lieutenant had had the great honour of being related to the burgomaster's family. "Is it he?" said the others, looking at Mistress Utter.

"Yes, truly," said she. "But, my dear friend, why do you speak so strangely and unfriendly of an old acquaintance? Was she not once quite a favourite, and an ornament to our town?"

"What?" exclaimed the two younger ladies, "an ornament to our town! Mistress Utter surely deceives herself."

The burgomaster's wife, who, up to this time, had been silent, now spoke with great dignity. "My ladies, it is not to be denied that Mistress Utter, in one sense, is right. The time was—not so long ago—when I looked upon this young person, who, in spite of her poverty, conducted herself so steadily and diligently, really as an ornament to our town, and a pattern to its young people; but a proud spirit caused all her unhappiness. She brought her own punishment on herself, and she will still be punished, since one may presume that people will care as little about her now as she did about her old acquaintances, whom she never once invited to go and see her, when she went to live at the grand Malcolm's-Ness, and where she only sought the society of the Baroness of Segerstad and such fine people."

"Besides this," said the doctor's wife, "one can well remember the hasty and forced visits which the good lady paid here, before she went on her foreign travels; when she invited us all to go to eat cherries, when no one was at the place but poor Mrs. N——. One can but laugh to think how, when we returned, we found that she had talked us all over, this one with this and another with that! But setting all this aside, such things have been told about her husband who is gone, that she can hardly expect any one to acknowledge her."

"Any one to acknowledge her!—what do you mean by that?" asked the clergyman's wife. "Do you not think that she will be ashamed to come here, when she must know that no one would notice her? I was out there at the time of the auction, and intended to pay her a visit to console her; but although she was then in such embarrassed circumstances, she still thought fit to play the fine lady. To say that she could receive no one! That is all very well for a countess, but is too laughable for a simple lieutenant's wife, and especially from a person who formerly lived by her own labour."

Old Mistress Utter let the first storm vent itself, whilst she listened in silence. However, after it had lasted for some time uncontrolled, and without the active tongues appearing to get tired, she began, in the gentle and hearty tone which was peculiar to the good old lady: "My dear friends and kind neighbours," said she, as she held up her hand reprovingly, "what, in Heaven's name, then, are we? What surety has the Lord given us that our sails will always be filled by favourable winds, that we should so boast ourselves? 'To-day, me; to-morrow, thee,' says an old proverb. Let us be Christian-like."

"Christian?" rejoined the clergyman's wife.

"Yes, truly, my good Sophy. And I need not remind you that a minister's wife should, more than any other, be tolerant. I am convinced that if our good pastor were here, he would be of my side."

"That is quite possible, my good aunt; but I know not whether one ought to be considered unchristian, because one will not encourage vanity and pride."

"I believe that now there is no question of either one or the other," said Mistress Utter. "Marie Louise is so thoroughly cured of her old faults, that, on the contrary, she has become one of the most humble and subdued of women. She has gone through great trials; trials that purify the mind and cause reflection. At this moment she is destitute of everything, and sits with her old mother in a desolate dwelling in the forest. Her husband died in consequence of an accident, and with his burial their last resources are exhausted."

"The poor creature! and is she, then, quite humbled and contrite?"

"The poor woman! she has, then, had to kiss the rod: the punishment will have done her good."

"The poor thing! it is very well that she was accustomed to work before she became rich. Now she must resume her old habits."

"The poor unfortunate! she must now go to her fashionable friends and beg for assistance."

These were the remarks made by the circle of ladies. Old Mistress Utter continued: "She formerly belonged to this town, and it would be a beautiful thing, and a proof of the noble and good feelings that prevail here, if, forgetting these little trifles, which are not worth mentioning, the inhabitants were to invite her, in a friendly way, to return here."

"Here! and on what, in the name of Heaven, can she live?" asked the burgomaster's wife. "She lived here before, to be sure, when she was poor; but you must remember that she then had the Baroness of Segerstad to assist her; and no one can expect that we should support her, merely because the good-for-nothing lieutenant happened to be a distant cousin of my husband."

"I certainly did not mean that. Marie Louise can work, as she formerly did, and why should she not get plenty of occupation from town and country? She would certainly work at a very low price, and accept any kind of work that was offered her."

"Perhaps," said the little clergyman's wife, contemptuously, "the Engineer Williamson will be renewing his addresses."

The doctor's wife burst into a laugh at this remark, so absurd did it appear to her; but the burgomaster's wife said, seriously: "It is rather malicious in you, ladies, to make such a joke. You know, as well as I, that a man in Engineer Williamson's situation, and of such a character as his, is not likely to trouble himself about her again."

Mistress Utter, to whom it was important to cut short this part of the subject, pressed them to a decision with regard to her proposal.

They were silent, and considered. It would, they thought, be very charming to go to the grand lady of Malcolm's-Ness, or to send for her to their houses, and after graciously pointing to a seat near the clock or the stove, have to say to her: "I have sent for you to know if you can make this dress for my little Alfred?" Oh, that would be a triumph quite worthy of their little town.

"I think," said the clergyman's wife, who liked to take the lead, "that they might as well come here. We can give them a little assistance. She made a collection for the poor herself when she was at the Baths, and we can subscribe together. I will ask my husband to draw up a petition."

The patience of the good Mistress Utter was nearly exhausted, but once more she armed herself with the weapon of gentle persuasion: "My dear good friends," said the worthy old lady, "when we are going to do a good action, let us do it thoroughly, and without any drawbacks. I will take it on me to write to the poor Marie Louise to propose to her to come here; but let me add, without any insincerity, that all her acquaintances in the town will receive her with the deep and true sympathy that her fate deserves. I can well imagine how thankful and touched and surprised she will be at this intelligence, which she certainly could not have expected. But," added she, as a thought flashed suddenly into her mind, "if it is to be done, it ought to be done at once, before the grand people begin to do anything for her. I should be so glad to have it to say, that we were the first to act in the matter."

The right nail was hit on the head.

"I have considered the matter," said the burgomaster's wife, now raising her voice, "and have come to the same decision as my good friend Mistress Utter; and it is particularly my duty, as the wife of the principal person in the town, to send an invitation to these poor people. As well as I can remember, the people of fashion have always come to us when there was any question of a good deed that does honour to the society, and very certainly it will now be so. Madame von Walden belonged more to the nobles than to the burghers, or, rather she is a bird that fluttered between the two; but after her wings have been cut, when amongst her grand patrons, they may grow again under the shelter of the walls that will provide her with bread and a home, before the nobles find out what has become of her."

After these words of wisdom from the lips of the burgomaster's wife, no more opposition was heard. They all declared that they thought the same themselves, and should have said so, if their good hostess had not spoken first; and as one extreme lies very often near the other, they now burned with impatience to ascertain that they were not too late.

The postmaster's wife threw out a hint, that through a letter of her husband, addressed to the district newspaper, it might be represented how the former noble family of N——, who had so distinguished themselves by their good actions, were now themselves fallen a sacrifice to want, and that a helping hand might be held out to a poor and worthy widow; and it would not be the first time that the burghers of the town had given their neighbours so praiseworthy an example.

CHAPTER XXVII.

They talk and laugh, and questions ask,
And take upon themselves the task,
For thee and for thy future fate,
All things to regulate.

ADLERBETH.

"Now, then, how has your visit ended?" asked the counsellor, when the old lady, quite warm from the debate in the sessions-chamber of the burgomaster's wife, entered, and exclaimed, breathlessly: "Lisa, my child—untie my cloak for me!"

"Well, then, father, it was rather a difficult affair at first, but, thank God, the victory is won! and, if I am not mistaken, Mrs. Neander opposite will have the pleasure of letting her bow-windowed room again. It is seldom that she can get lodgers for that floor."

"Do you not think it would be better if we were to look out for another place for them?" suggested the counsellor. "I should be very pleased to have my little friend—my pretty flower, as I called her—again as a neighbour; but if it should annoy her that we had taken for them the same rooms that they lived in when they were poor, I would much rather go a few steps further to visit them."

"Believe me, father, that just those rooms will be the very best for them, and it will do their hearts good to see them again. They will think that everything is nearly the same as in former days, and perhaps it will be so. But we will now consider how we are to get our letter written. It would be excellent if we could get everything settled before William comes back. Look you, father. On my way home, I thought to myself how charming it would be, if we were to prepare him such a surprise, so that when he looks out, he should see the frost on the panes of the old bow-window thawed again, and a well-known face looking out. Ah! it would be worth something to see his astonishment—for he believes her to be still married, and living out there in the forest. What do you say, father? We have a fortnight before us."

"A capital idea, mother; a really capital idea! But a fortnight is very scanty time. Only think, that they have first to get the letter, and then the little that they have left to pack up and bring here."

"Oh, that will not give them much trouble. Dear me! if I only knew of any one whom we could send to help them, and settle matters for them."

"Any one—hem! Now, mother, do you know I think that I am the very best person to go to them. It is true that it is seven or eight years since I took a journey, but such a short one—only a day's ride—can do me no harm, and would perhaps do me good. And when I think what joy it will give the poor creatures to find that their old friends still remember them, it makes me feel quite young again. No sooner said than done, mother. We will get out my old wolfskin cloak to-morrow, and send for the tailor to see what can be done to it; and the shoemaker shall set my over-boots to rights, that are getting mouldy in the closet there."

"Ah, my old man, I cannot venture to let you go! I fear me you would be frozen."

"What nonsense, mother!" rejoined the counsellor, angrily; "as if I was such a worn-out old trunk of a tree as could bear neither wind nor weather! Besides this," added he, moved by the anxious expression in the eyes of his old wife, "you may be quite easy. The beautiful woollen gloves that you gave me at Christmas will quite protect me. Let us see! How soon could I be ready? To-morrow, I will arrange with Mrs. Neander about the rooms; and the day after, or, at the latest, on Wednesday, I will start in search of my deserted ladies, like a knight in one of the romance books."

The old lady was obliged to consent to the chivalrous intentions of the counsellor; and on Wednesday morning he started, accompanied by the greetings and invitations of the whole town, and, above all, provided by Mistress Utter with a large provision bag, and a bottle of mulled wine, which was to be kept warm in the pocket of the fur cloak, so that he might get well through the business that his kind heart had planned. The counsellor was so well wrapped up in his furs, that the air could only now and then pay a fugitive visit to his nose; and as the weather was fine and the roads good, he accomplished the journey uncommonly well. But he began to look about him very carefully when, rather late in the evening, and by the light of a bright moon, he entered the great gloomy forest, in whose deepest recesses the little dwelling stood.

"Somewhere about there," said his guide, as he pointed up a pathway thickly grown over, "was it that the lieutenant met with his accident."

The old man shuddered, and cast a half glance to the spot indicated. "How do the poor ladies live now?" asked he.

"Oh, I fear they are rather pinched; and they would have been still more so, if it had not been for the things that have been sent them from the great houses round about."

"So, then, they have had assistance sent them?"

"Yes, indeed. From Kronby a whole cart-load came for the burial, and from many other places they have had presents sent them. For you see, though the genteel ladies and gentlemen would not have anything to do with the lieutenant since his dissolute life began—and one cannot wonder at that, for even an honest peasant would turn aside as he met him—yet his wife was always held in high favour. But one knows how such presents are relished when one is obliged to accept them from those who were once our equals; and the poor ladies must by this time have used up all their firewood."

Amid such talk, our traveller reached, at last, the object of his journey.

"There! if the gentleman can see a red-painted house, that stands out from amongst the snowdrifts, with a light in one of the casements—that is where they live."

The counsellor's woollen glove was drawn across his eyes. Not without much emotion could he see that light shining out from the lonely dwelling, which stood imbedded in the snow. That was, then, the home of Marie Louise—the home of her whom he last saw riding out in an elegant equipage, which was the admiration of every one. The beautiful, proud young woman, how would she now appear?

"One cannot quite get up to it," said the guide. "I will, therefore, stop here, and then take the sledge on to Nils Persson's, where the gentleman can have a night's lodging—for I doubt if the ladies will be able to offer one—and then we must go up by the foot-path, which is trodden in the snow."

"You are right," said the counsellor, and began to alight from the carriage.

It was only a short distance to the door. The old man soon knocked, and it was opened. With a burning torch of pine-wood in her hand, Marie Louise advanced.

"Ah, whom do I see!" she exclaimed, almost overcome with joy and emotion.

The counsellor, not much less moved, let the family treasure, the precious wolfskin, fall unheeded to the ground, and stretched out his arms to embrace his pretty flower, the beauty of the bow-window.

"Words," stammered Marie Louise, as she led the old man to the small fire in the chamber, from which, the day after the funeral, the bed had been seized—"words can never express what I feel at this indescribable kindness, my dear old Counsellor Utter—mamma, mamma!"

Her mother came quickly from the inner room, and once more embraced her faithful old friend. He never felt so rich and so powerful as at this moment, and he only wished that his old wife had been there, to share this heart-enjoyment with him.

We will pass over the talk that followed, as well as the grateful joy of the mother and daughter, when they found that not only was the counsellor come to fetch them, but that the towns-peeple, forgetting all little causes of offence, were ready to receive their old friends kindly.

Above all things, Marie Louise rejoiced that she should return to her former beloved home, where she had spent so many happy days, and where peace might still await her.

Two days after, the two inhabitants of the solitary dwelling were ready to leave their home, in which the last long year had been passed. What did not Marie Louise feel, as, for the last time, she crossed the threshold, and heard for the last time the door of the dwelling shut behind her, from which she had seen carried out the corpse of her child and that of her husband.

The whole town was in commotion on the day when the former occupants of the bow-window, after an absence of several years, returned to seek a shelter amongst them. The sledge stopped before the house of Counsellor Utter.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. N——, who, in spite of her tears, had self-possession enough to be able to look around her, "to whom in the world belongs that great house, that has been built since we went away?"

"It belongs to our little engineer," said the counsellor, laughing; "but he is, as I have already mentioned, absent, at present, on a journey."

Marie Louise cast a look at the handsome dwelling, and suppressed a sigh.

In a few minutes she lay trembling, with the thousand different feelings that assailed her, on the warm heart of old Mrs. Utter. There was it well with her; there she felt herself at home. The old lady looked tenderly into her eyes, and said: "Welcome, child of my heart! Thou wilt let me call thee my child!"

Marie Louise pressed her lips to the hand of her respected friend, and stammered out words without meaning; she could not speak.

But soon she must not only speak, but give an answer; and although the counsellor and his wife had hoped that their neighbours would show delicacy of feeling enough to let the first evening pass over in undisturbed repose, they were mistaken. Within an hour old Mistress Utter, or rather her guests, had half the town calling to pay their visits. They could not forego such a good opportunity of saying: "You are welcome back amongst us, Madame von Walden! We are, thank God! not the people to let any one feel the change in their circumstances;" or, "We are, thank God! too superior to trifles to keep in mind things that it would be wrong to mention at present," &c. &c. But it was almost a disappointment to them to find that in one important point they had miscalculated; they had, for instance, quite expected to see Marie Louise dressed in an old, short, bombazeen gown, with a rusty black shawl over her shoulders, and a yellow mourning collar of washed-out muslin—in a word, in the sort of costume which is generally worn by a poor widow in very reduced circumstances. This hope was quite defeated, since Marie Louise wore a very handsome mourning dress. The material for this, as well as the large silk shawl which she had on, had been sent to her from the owners of Kronby, immediately after the burial of her husband. It was accompanied by a kind and sympathizing letter from the baroness, in which she invited Marie Louise and her mother to spend a couple of weeks with her. In a warmly-expressed and thankful answer, she had declined this, not wishing any longer to associate with those so much above her in circumstances.

"So," said the burgomaster's wife, who heard this in a corner from the counsellor, who thought it would raise Marie Louise in her eyes; "so they really invited her! She did quite right to decline it, for it would have only been for a couple of weeks, and they would have thought that they had done enough; our town, on the contrary, does nothing by halves. But, Mistress Utter, she would have done well to have laid aside the handsome mourning dress the day they came here."

"She had no other mourning," whispered the old lady; "and it would have excited remarks if she had come in a coloured dress."

"That is true—but she ought not to spoil her best dress by wearing it on week days," continued the burgomaster's wife, who thought she had now a right to interfere in everything, even in the dress of Marie Louise. "I will send her, to-morrow, a black bombazine that I have left off wearing, which she can alter and make very decent, since, thank God! I never spare the stuff when I have a new dress made."

"And I," said the little minister's wife, "will send a black shawl and apron, which are still very good, as I only wore them two years ago, when I was in mourning for my grandmother."

After this was decided they felt more satisfied, as it was now certain that they would see the "beauty of the bow-window," the grand Madame von Walden, in an old black bombazeen gown, which was the dress most suited to her present state.

As to the way and manner in which Marie Louise comported herself on this occasion, all were contented with the unpretending simplicity and unaffected politeness that she displayed. To be sure, thought they, she might have been still more humble, and expressed more thanks; but in her eyes lay something that thanked them all, and they could not but confess that, on the whole, she behaved as was most becoming.

As they took their leave that evening, Marie Louise received a number of most pressing invitations, for they had not learned half of what they wanted to know. At last the hour came for Marie Louise, at the side of her mother, to enter again the dwelling from which, six years before, she had gone as a rich heiress, and to which she now returned so poor, that she had no chair, no table, on which she could lean for support. She tottered to the window in the bow, and sank upon her knees, thanking God that, after all these storms and trials, she had been allowed to reach the haven, which, before, had seemed so small, but now was large enough. Here had her happy days of youth been passed, and here would she, perhaps, pass the whole of her future life. It seemed to Marie Louise as if a breath of heavenly peace now filled her heart; she breathed easier, she felt neither fear nor desire, neither expectation nor remembrance; all was extinguished in the calm satisfaction of the moment.

The good mother softly approached, and laid her arms round her now pacified daughter. "My child, my beloved child! Here we shall be again, as we once were. Ah! how great, how good is God!"

"Yes," answered Marie Louise, as she raised her hands to heaven, to the thousand sparkling worlds in the calm blue heavens—"Yes, how good, how great! Never in my life shall I forget this evening."

The next morning Marie Louise was to experience other feelings. On this day the town exhibited its best powers in activity. Servant maids and errand boys came in dozens from all the town ladies, with the thousand necessaries which they presumed would be wanted by the new comers, in bundles, baskets, and packets of every description. Their liberality displayed itself not only in eatables, but in a quantity of more or less worn-out articles of dress, from the bombazeen dress of the burgomaster's wife down to old linen. If they had had the intention to inflict a downright painful torture, they could not have discovered a better means of accomplishing it than through this feast of atonement. Marie Louise had been, it is true, as the townspeople said, stunned by misfortune; but she had still too much delicacy of feeling left, not to have preferred to work many a night long than to have to stand one whole day thanking and curtsying, and unpacking one bundle after another, without daring to reject a single article, or to show anything but the greatest gratitude and thankfulness. At last, in the evening, as the door was closed, Marie Louise, whose bitter feelings could no longer be repressed, sank on her mother's bosom, and concealed her face upon her shoulder.

"Yes, yes, my child," said the good mother, as she raised her daughter's brow, which glowed with shame. "You have had to go through all this! But from to-day, I prophesy all the disagreeable will end. The people of the town have, on the whole, behaved better than I even ventured to expect, and for this we have to thank our good friends, the Utters,—our true friends, who have done so much for us."

"Yes; with them it is true benevolence and sympathy," said Marie Louise; "and it does the heart good to receive proofs of their kind feelings. But mamma, the old soiled bombazeen dress of the burgomaster's wife—to have to wear that——"

"My dearest child, are you, who have borne well the severest strokes of misfortune, to be overcome by the mere stings of a fly? One must remember how well intentioned all this is, even if one is aware how much a little delicacy of feeling would have raised the value of such acts. I cannot believe that you will allow this trifle to influence you. Wash the dress, and put it on as soon as you can. To appease old feelings of envy, and show yourself duly humbled, you must put on this dress when you go to the burgomaster's house."

And this was done.

Marie Louise felt it a hard struggle, it is true; but she conquered her rebellious feelings; and never did the burgomaster's wife smile with a more satisfied air, than when, holding Marie Louise by the arm, she turned her round, and exclaimed: "Bless me! how cleverly the little lady has dressed herself out in my old colours! Yes, yes, misfortune is a good schoolmaster."

* * * * * *

The patience of the old counsellor and his wife was almost exhausted before the week came to an end. However, one evening, just as the old lady had said to her husband: "By this time he ought to have been here twice over," the sound of sledge bells was heard. A sledge drove up to the door, and in a few minutes Williamson stood in the middle of their little parlour, his arms around his old hostess, and she, in her turn, embracing him. Over the way it was all dark, since, as in former times, the lamp was never lighted early, and the fire burned low. But at the sound of the bells, Marie Louise had peeped behind the blind, and had seen a well-known form alight. She had never seen Williamson since the beginning of her married life, when he had paid a visit to Malcolm's-Ness; but often, during the time of her misery, she had perceived traces of, and benefited by, his near presence. Now, however, the thought of seeing him again caused her the greatest uneasiness and embarrassment, and she hoped that he might not come to them, at least not soon. Long after he had gone into the house, her eyes rested, as they often did, on the new-built white house that stood out so conspicuously from all the others. Marie Louise could never look at it without reflecting on the change that had taken place in their relative positions; and her heart beat, and her cheeks burned, when she remembered how its possessor had come as a stranger, and had settled in the town where she was at home: now he was at home and she a stranger.

Mistress Utter, who had seen that all was in darkness at her opposite neighbour's, and that Williamson could not have remarked any difference, made a sign to the counsellor to keep quiet, and much as it cost him to obey, he had not the heart to disturb her scheme.

The old lady, who was accustomed, on the evenings of Williamson's return, always to detain him for a long time down stairs in her own parlour, and who, besides, could see, this evening, in his face, that he had much to tell of old and new times in his native place, could not, however, much as she liked to hear him talk, make up her mind to postpone the discovery which awaited her little engineer, so pleaded a headache, and the want of rest, which he too must feel, for breaking up the party earlier than usual.

Williamson, who thought this was rather extraordinary, persuaded himself, however, that he should find some new piece of furniture, or some such thing in his room to surprise him, therefore took the old lady's hint in good part, and, not to try her patience, bid them good night. According to his usual custom when he entered his room, he placed the light on the table and went to the window, the curtains of which were not drawn. He looked out, and it seemed to him as if he must be either crazy, or in a dream. The bow-window opposite was lighted up, and behind the blind he could perceive a shadow—the very same outline which long years before had a hundred times set his very heart in flames. After he had for a few minutes contemplated the beloved phantom—in silent fear that all might again vanish from his sight, he rushed impetuously from his room, and found his old friend without, waiting ready to receive the reward due to her for her silence and her cunning.

"What is all this? What does this mean?" he asked, pointing to over the way.

"Ah, my dear William, be calm! They are lodgers, I suppose."

"Who? who?"

"Hey day! How hasty—you frighten me to death! They are two ladies."

"And no one else—where is then——"

"He, whom you mean," answered the old lady, in deep emotion, "is gone, gone far away; he is dead."

Williamson sank down on a chair, and leaned his head upon his hands. From his lips came but four words, but they were uttered in a tone which expressed better than words the amount and depth of his feelings. "Marie Louise—a widow!"

After the powerful and startling surprise of the first moments was somewhat allayed, the old woman, and also the old man, who had in the meantime joined them, related all that had happened and been done. First of all came the death of the lieutenant, then the letter of Mrs. N——, then the high session held at the house of the burgomaster, the journey of the old counsellor, the condition in which he had found the two ladies, their return and reception in the town, the day of the great present-sending —all, even to the dilemma which Marie Louise had been placed in by the old bombazeen dress of the burgomaster's wife, all—all was related, whilst Williamson, in a perfect fever of excitement, wept and laughed by turns, and embraced the old people, praising them for all that they had done. But the bombazeen story made him quite outrageous. "They want to kill her," said he, "with their vulgar malice—the horrid old women!"

"Hush, my little William!" remonstrated the old lady; "how can you dare to call us so? I assure you that with this little act of penance all the difficulties have been smoothed over, and everything is restored to its former condition. The whole town has given proofs of the most friendly intentions towards our friends."

"Yes, yes, Aunt Gretchen, that may be. I know the town and its good intentions, and value them as they deserve. But just tell me, now, how Marie Louise comports herself as a widow?"

"Quite as one would expect from a woman of her good sense and good heart. Every one can see that she does not mourn her husband's loss very deeply; but there is something so sorrowful and subdued in her whole appearance, and if she has to speak of her husband, whom she has no great reason to praise, considering that he ran through all her property, and made her unhappy in every sort of way, she yet alludes to him with expressions of love and resignation. She is certainly a perfect model of a woman."

"Yes, indeed, a perfect model!" said Williamson, as he walked hurriedly up and down the room. "I know well what she is; for many a dark and lonely night have I been out there, standing by her lowly window, and have heard how, with her own lips, she has begged and entreated him, with angel's words, to change his manner of life. And with what exemplary patience has she not borne her poverty! Never did she complain, never utter a reproach to him for having plunged her in misery. Ah! she was more than an angel; for it can cost the angels nothing to be good and pure, but she was a woman, and raised herself above all that was common and mortal. I have admired her—I have idolized her; and I will declare before the whole world that I know no one who is deserving of greater respect and esteem."

"My dear young man, now you are too open-hearted," said the old lady, smiling. "Keep these things to yourself, and let no one suspect, for Heaven's sake, that you have been spying and watching her in this way, for all the world would not judge of it as I and my good man."

Williamson blushed, and as he held out his hand to his faithful friend, he replied: "Wisely spoken, Aunt Gretchen. I am ashamed at having——but forget all about it, except what I said last; for I will maintain that she is more than an angel, and deserving of the greatest respect."

With a hearty good night the old people retired, and left Williamson to the undisturbed enjoyment of the shadow on the window-blind.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

This goes wrong, and that goes wrong,
Enough to drive one mad.
BELLMANN.

ON the following morning, Williamson began his old operations with the window curtains, which, to the great satisfaction of Mistress Utter, had been let alone for many a year.

Then leaning over the table, he enjoyed the more than ever pleasing view of Marie Louise's arm at the window, moving about as she busied herself over the plants which the Counsellor Utter had made her a present of. That hand, which raised the stems, and fastened them to their supports, was it not as white and beautiful as ever? And that face, become so pale with sorrow, did it not bear an expression of touching beauty and peace, that was more than ever charming? Many a time that morning Williamson seized his hat, in order to cross the street as formerly; but, strange to say, with a return to old times, had returned also his old shyness. He knew not whether she suspected that she was indebted to him for many alleviations of her misery, and he feared to see her, not knowing whether this sympathy—proof as it had been of undiminished tenderness—had been agreeable to her.

And now she was free!

"Free!" This word, the whole night long, had resounded in his ear; and with extraordinary accuracy, he had calculated how many days a year of widowhood contains. Unfortunately, he could not discover that it has less days than another; and a year seemed to him, just now, like a whole century.

Already had Mrs. N——, that morning, rubbed and dusted the hired furniture of their apartment twice over. Marie

Louise had put on her handsome mourning dress. The widow's cap became her remarkably well.

Each time that a step was heard on the stairs, the mother and daughter's eyes met. Mrs. N—— smiled; Marie Louise became red; but each time they were deceived. It was either one of the people of the house going up to the garret, or it was some message from this or that of the town ladies about a dress, a cap, or a collar, or some other article which Marie Louise had in hand for them.

It became noon. Now no one was likely to come.

"Well," said Mistress Utter, during dinner; "what have you been doing up stairs, my good William, the whole of this forenoon? I expected you would have gone out to pay a visit to some one; you certainly will go this evening?"

"Yes, I ought, indeed," said Williamson.

But whether he ought or ought not, whether he would or would not, it was not done. He dressed himself, and at least ten times took up his hat and gloves: but when he remembered that he would be obliged to say some words of condolence to Marie Louise about her widowed state, and about his own pleasure at their return to the town, all courage forsook him, and not only this evening was passed over, but many following days, without his visit being paid.

The gossips in the *sessions* parlour of the burgomaster's wife observed this, and said: "Williamson behaves in a very proper manner, in showing his opinion so plainly."

Mistress Utter said: "My good friend, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Mrs. N—— said: "Can time have so changed him?"

Marie Louise said nothing.

And thus passed a whole week.

The inmates of the bow-windowed room already began to give up all thoughts of receiving a visit, when, one evening, in the quiet twilight hour, when the firelight shone upon the graceful form of Marie Louise as she sat before it embroidering, the door opened softly, and a person with a large roll of paper under his arm appeared, standing irresolutely on the threshold.

"Ah, welcome, my good Engineer Williamson!" exclaimed Mrs. N——, heartily.

A light rosy cloud passed over Marie Louise's face. This name had a strange sound, and the sight of its owner a still stranger power. She was as little capable as Williamson of bringing out a single word. There was too much, far too much, in this moment for thought or feeling to find expression.

"Be so good as to sit down, my good Engineer," said Mrs. N——, who remarked that she alone must speak. Williamson bowed, and took a seat near Marie Louise, who felt deeply ashamed that she could find nothing to say to him who so well deserved a kind word from her. But it was impossible for her to thank him; for in doing so she would have acknowledged that she knew from whom all the attentions came. At last her eyes fell upon the roll of paper that he had still under his arm, and this relieved her from her embarrassment. "Ah," said she, with a smile, that had in it to Williamson something inexpressibly charming, "you have a plan, I see; will the Engineer, then, trust me to do some work for him, as I formerly——"

But here Marie Louise could not get any farther; recollections closed her lips.

"I was not quite sure," answered Williamson, as he fidgeted with his roll of paper in his confusion, "whether I might venture. But the days are becoming lighter, so that probably——"

"Ah, yes, so it will," rejoined Marie Louise; "it will be so agreeable to be able to resume an old employment."

"And dare an old friend," continued Williamson, who, now the ice was broken, began to feel more courageous, "dare he venture to visit his neighbours as formerly, and give them his poor counsels?"

Marie Louise was silent; but her mother replied that, excepting Counsellor Utter and his wife, she knew no one who would be more welcome.

The lamp was lighted, and Williamson seated himself at the table near Marie Louise, who had again taken up her embroidery.

What moments now followed for him, who had so long been denied the blessedness of sitting so near her! At first he satisfied himself with the sight of her alone. It seemed to him as if she had become inexpressibly more beautiful; the time that she had passed in the school of misfortune had given to her features a purity and delicacy which they had not before displayed. But conversation soon flowed; and what was said bore the stamp of a heartfelt and inward blessedness.

"What a fine large house Mr. Engineer has built," said Mrs. N——; "it is quite an ornament to the town."

"That plot of ground wanted filling up," said Williamson; "and in the intervals of business, it was an agreeable amusement to have such an active employment as its superintendence. As for the garden, however, which is the best part of it, I have principally to thank the exertions of Counsellor Utter; for, next summer, I hope we shall have to admire the counsellor's taste in the laying out of the grounds.

"I thought," said Marie Louise, "that you were always absent in summer, Mr. Engineer?"

"Not quite! When a surveyor has worked a certain number of years, he can confide a great deal of his business to well-qualified assistants. I still travel a good deal, and still work in field and forest—which I shall always continue to do as long as I am capable of work, for I love activity—but I have now not less than four assistants, who help me to bear my burthen."

"And to reap the harvest also," added Mrs. N——.

"Very true, and as God has blessed it, I can even now and then take a holiday in summer time."

That Williamson's visit was renewed at proper intervals may be well imagined.

Again Marie Louise sat there colouring maps and plans; again Williamson stood behind her chair, and followed attentively each motion of her hand. And should she by chance turn her head to him as she asked a question, she encountered a glance, which, in spite of her widow's weeds, brought the blood into her cheeks. But when Williamson found himself caught in one of these looks, which could not but be considered contraband, he pretended to have business to do, and hastened quickly home. He feared so much to give Marie Louise cause to complain of any want of delicacy of feeling towards her.

"These visits," said, among themselves, the ladies of the town, "begin really to be suspicious—but our good, excellent engineer would never act so contrary to sound reason as to seriously cast his eyes on such a humble object, when he might make the best match in the town if he pleased."

"Oh, no, no," the worthy ladies consoled themselves, "it is only out of humanity, sheer humanity, and because he wishes to imitate us! He knows that she never had more need of such employment as he can give her than at present."

But Mistress Utter patted her little engineer's cheek, and said: "Take care only, and do nothing untimely. Remember that it is a long time before the year is over; do you know that, my young gentleman?"

Williamson answered in the same sportive tone: "When the year of widowhood is over, widows can marry again. But, Aunt Gretchen, have you heard what time the law* has fixed for the beginning of a new courtship?"

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* It would appear by this, that in Sweden a law exists to prevent the marriage of a widow before the expiration of a year.—Tr.

"You rogue!—the law cannot think of everything. But I must then make a law, that courtship shall be followed quickly by marriage, for secret betrothals have never pleased me."

"And as little do they please me," said Williamson, "yet necessity knows no law; in April, I must go into the country."

"And you stay there until late in the autumn?" continued Aunt Gretchen.

"Yes, we shall see. Till Whitsuntide, at all events!"

"Are you crazy! Whitsuntide is only——"

"One month after Easter," interrupted Williamson; "can Aunt Gretchen reasonably desire more?"

"Yes, indeed, that I can! Don't let me see you here again until Midsummer, or I shall take it ill of you. Propriety must be attended to, my young man, or else the old woman will have nothing to do with you."

"Well, then, not till Midsummer."

When Williamson took leave in April, he made his neighbours promise to look upon his garden as their own; but he also exacted a promise from Aunt Gretchen that they should not be allowed to go into the new house. Mistress Utter guessed why this was not to be, and guessed also when they were to be shown the inside of it. Therefore she gave the required promise, and kept it too.

Behind the curtain stood Marie Louise watching the departure of Williamson.

Her mother was at the window, and received his cordial farewell greeting. How different was it from that which on a former occasion she received on the same spot?

"It will seem a long time until we see him again," said the mother, looking towards her daughter; but the latter avoided her eyes, and sat down again to her work.

As the spring advanced, Marie Louise walked by the side of the counsellor up and down the gravel paths of the new garden, and enjoyed a feeling of happiness and peace that she had fancied to be gone for ever. With each morning sun that rose upon her life, her heart became more and more expanded. The dark clouds rolled away, and left behind a remembrance that was sorrowful, yet without bitterness; for past misfortunes, if only accompanied by a peaceful conscience, yield a blessedness almost as great as joy, although a trembling tone of sadness be mingled with it.

It was the greatest delight of Marie Louise to be able to sit at sun-set in the shadow of the counsellor's espaliers, and look down upon the flowing river which formed one of the garden's boundaries. It was all so sweetly peaceful and harmonious. And the possessor of all this was shortly expected home, and then how would it all be? At this thought, which returned so often against her will, came a long repelled feeling back into her heart. She forced herself, however, to forget this subject which so confused her thoughts, and led her into dreaming, at times when she was obliged to work.

Midsummer was already some time past, and yet Williamson had not returned, and Mistress Utter began to fear the arrival of a letter, "in the name of humanity," to announce another illness, when at last the engineer arrived, fresh and well, and sunburnt, but in a very bad humour, because his business had detained him three days beyond the time he had fixed for his return home.

"You do not come a day too late, my good friend," said Aunt Gretchen, to console him, "since you have still, you know, a long time to wait."

But this well-meant consolation of the old lady was like a drop of water on a flaming fire. A few days stolen from expected bliss seemed an irreparable evil, and could only be atoned for by now losing no second of time.

"For Heaven's sake, do not run away again like a madman!"

entreated Mistress Utter. "You are as dusty as if you had been spending the night on the high road."

"That I did do," said Williamson, as he ran up stairs to his own room; for Aunt Gretchen was right, he must make something of a toilette, let him be ever in such haste.

"Where, in the name of goodness, are you going, mamma?" said Marie Louise, and tried to detain her mother as she was about to leave the room.

"How strange you are, my dear child!" answered Mrs. N——. "Where should I go but into the kitchen, to look after my chocolate?" And, thanking God that she had the same custom for it as formerly, she went away to her occupation, without Marie Louise having courage to own to her that she wanted her presence.

About this time Marie Louise had worn widow's weeds nearly six months. It was the first time that, without exactly knowing why, she had noticed the circumstance, and that she had, perhaps unconsciously, made a change in her dress. The warm summer's day, and the warm black dress, were ill suited to each other. She put on, this afternoon, a muslin dress, which was suited for half-mourning, which she had lately remodelled. Perhaps she had never in her life felt more embarrassed than when her mother, putting her head into the room to look at the clock, called out in surprise: "You are not going out in that dress, my dear child!"

"No, mamma, I am not going out."

"I thought so, or you would have been differently dressed."

"Am I never to wear a lighter dress? I find the black one so warm."

Mrs. N—— shut the door, without giving an answer.

Marie Louise opened it again. "Is there anything remarkable in my wearing this gown, dear mamma?"

"Not at all, my child. You may, from this time, begin to make a little change in your mourning. That is all very well at home—provided you remember that nothing else can or ought to be changed."

This time it was Marie Louise who shut the door, and she sat down in silence to her work. Half an hour passed, during which her needle was drawn in and out of her embroidery, whilst her eyes glanced occasionally through the curtains, and across the street. On a sudden she became red, and pale, and again red: some one came down the steps of the opposite house. Marie Louise stood up, and thought she would go into the next room to her mother, but sat down again on the chair, however, before she could act upon the thought. The whole of her embroidery apparatus fell to the ground, and Marie Louise was busied in picking up muslin, cotton-ball, scissors, and all, when the door opened suddenly, and Williamson stood by her side. He looked as if he would that moment have pressed her to his heart, and as if only the greatest effort enabled him to conquer the impetuosity of his feelings.

"Welcome home, Mr. Engineer!" said Marie Louise, as she tried to recover her composure. "It must have been very warm to-day for travelling."

"Warm? Oh, that is saying too little! The sun is burning, the sand of the road is burning, everything is burning hot to-day."

"But here we are nice and cool," rejoined Marie Louise, yet without one of those bewitching and coquettish smiles, that in former days would have accompanied a remark that admitted of a double meaning! Now, on the contrary, she looked as if she meant neither more nor less than she said.

"I should like it better, were it less cool," said Williamson, "for strong contrasts are always painful to me, and have a painful effect on my mind."

"Mamma will certainly be here directly. Will Mr. Engineer in the meantime——" her eyes were turned to an empty chair.

"Ah, I entreat you, speak less like a stranger to me! If I only might say what I wish, I would remind you how cold words of this kind sound between persons whose acquaintance is as old as ours. I wish I was not obliged to say Madame von Walden; I wish I was not obliged to be called Mr. Engineer—these names sound deathly cold."

"But custom, form——" stammered out Marie Louise.

"Customs and forms! Ah, they are of little weight compared to——"

"No," said she, interrupting him in evident agitation, "they are not of little weight—recollect yourself——"

"Oh, be assured that I remember everything! One is not likely to forget what one is daily reminding oneself of; but one cannot submit for an eternity to customs and forms. I long inexpressibly for the moment when one may set these aside, as a token that the heart has greater claims than all the forms in the world."

"For Heaven's sake! do not speak so," entreated Marie Louise, unable any longer to restrain her feelings; "I earnestly beg of you to say no more."

"Ah, Marie Louise, must I even now be forbidden to speak?" Williamson took her hand in his, and his looks appealed to her remembrance.

"It is quite different now," answered she, softly.

"Yes, quite, quite different!" repeated he, "and therefore, even therefore, my dear, my ever beloved Marie Louise, must you not be harder towards me than my own fate has been! I do not ask, indeed, that to-day, before the whole world, I may be able to announce that this woman, whom I have adored for seven years, for whose happiness I would have sacrificed my heart's blood, for whom my tears have been wrung—Oh, God grant that I may never have to shed such again—this woman is now for ever mine; mine to reward me for all my sorrow, mine that I enjoy the highest, truest bliss that life can give. No! beloved, sweetest Marie Louise, I do not desire to be able to say all that. But here, in your own home, I may say it, here, where there is no listening ear of envy; here, where I can hear you without having to fear that a single word of yours might be taken from me by cold and strange lips. Speak, oh speak! are not all trials over now, all cares ended? Is not Marie Louise mine own?"

The feeling of blessedness was too great to find room in her heart—it took refuge in her eyes. Marie Louise had, it is true, still some power over those interpreters of the heart—the lips, but over her looks she had no longer any control. Williamson saw the tears tremble in her eyelids, and bright clouds flame into her cheeks. Yet, as he feared to make the same mistake again, as that which he had made six years before, he dared not translate this speech. He was determined to have a more audible proof, and would perhaps have received one, if at the same moment Mrs. N—— had not entered, with her arms full of chocolate cakes, greeting him with a hearty welcome.

Williamson, who had hitherto been always very friendly and polite to the worthy lady, with whom, in her troubles, he had had so much intercourse, wished her now, if not very far off, at least—back again in her kitchen. But Mrs. N—— had finished her business for the day, and remained there the whole evening, to Williamson's inexpressible vexation.

"Well, now, for God's sake, is not everything settled yet?" asked Aunt Gretchen, as Williamson came back, and she saw at a glance that the goal was not quite reached.

"Settled? oh, it will never be settled! But, to-morrow, dear Aunt Gretchen, you must invite them to take coffee in my garden, and THEN!" Williamson pressed the old woman's hand, and said: "Good night."

On the following day, Williamson was constantly busy in his new house; but when the afternoon arrived, he assisted Aunt Gretchen to arrange the table for coffee in the little bower close to the flowing river. A thousand times did his thoughts picture to him the things that might occur that evening; but in spite of such flights among the clouds, he lent an attentive eye to everything within and without doors. If fate did not bring him another disappointment, but should all go according to his wishes, the little festival should end within the new house, in his favourite apartment in the wing.

The clock had struck the important hour of four, the unfailing hour appointed for coffee-drinkings in all little towns, when the garden door was thrown wide open by Williamson himself, when the counsellor, with Mrs. N—— upon his arm, and Mistress Utter, with Marie Louise leaning on hers, entered his paradise.

"Bless me, what a display the engineer makes!" said Mrs. N——, as she perceived the silver coffee-pot and other luxurious articles, which shone so brightly in the golden sunshine. "This is one of your bachelor services, is it?"

Marie Louise contented herself with admiring the beautiful flowers that diffused their odour from two crystal vases.

"Thank you," said the counsellor, patting her on the shoulder. "My little flower flatters the gardener, whilst the mamma—— well, well, my dear neighbour, I will say nothing more," added the old man, jokingly.

Mistress Utter sat down at the table, and began to preside as hostess, and then came her turn to have her coffee praised, which every one thought incomparable.

In happy officiousness, and as blessed as a man can be on the day when, like Elisha, he hopes to pass from earth to heaven, Williamson went from one to the other, and every glance betrayed his feelings. After the coffee-service had been removed, and they had talked for some time on indifferent matters, Mistress Utter said to Mrs. N—— that she would show her how high her sweet peas had already grown.

No one could talk about garden affairs without the counsellor joining in. He followed thus the two old ladies, and Marie Louise would gladly have done the same, if Mistress Utter had not said, quite unintentionally, she would have it appear: "Dear Marie Louise, stay where you are; I am so afraid that Mops might spring on the table, and break the vases."

And in order to look after Mops and the vases Marie Louise remained behind.

"At last," cried Williamson, as the thick shrubbery concealed the walking party, "at last, my Marie Louise, there need be no more evasion. Here—— "

"Your obedient servants, your obedient servants, Mr. Engineer! What an agreeable, charming garden you have here."

The garden-gate had been open, and the postmaster's wife and the burgomaster's wife, who had extraordinary penetration in discovering where a coffee party was going on in the town, and after calling to see Mistress Utter, had taken the liberty, as they said, to come in search of their old friend.

"So much the better—your obedient servant,—extremely welcome, ladies! How happy my garden is in receiving such an honour. But as you say that our good friend, Mistress Utter, was the magnet—permit me."

Williamson offered each of the ladies, politely, an arm, to take them to the part of the garden where were the rest of the party. But with one accord, they declared that they found it so cool and pleasant in the bower, that they would sit there with their dear Madame von Walden a little while, if they did not intrude.

"I should like to know," thought Williamson to himself, "when you ever did anything else?" But aloud he said: "Then it is, at least, my duty to seek our hostess."

And he did so, and pretended not to hear the assurance that it was not necessary. On no account would he remain alone, between Marie Louise and these ladies.

"One can see," said the postmaster's wife, "that Madame von Walden has been as much plagued with the heat as we." She cast a significant glance at the muslin dress.

"Oh yes, indeed," answered she, blushing the more deeply because she knew that she blushed, "it is very warm."

"What, in the name of goodness, are you come about?" exclaimed Aunt Gretchen, as she saw her little engineer, with the most discontented air, come up to them, and she whispered in his ear: "Get away with you."

"Guests—as interesting as possible," rejoined Williamson. "The burgomaster's wife and the postmaster's wife. These amiable personages drive one mad with their stupid visits."

"Hush! Take care that you do not let anything out before these ladies, and console yourself; they will now go away."

But there was no question of this. They made all sorts of pretexts, on the contrary, to get inside the house. In this, however, all their clever manœuvres were unsuccessful, since Williamson either turned the conversation in another direction, or alleged a thousand excuses.

In spite of this the ladies remained, and were both in one of their most brilliant humours, carrying their friendly feelings so far, that when the hostess expressed no wish to keep them to supper, they assisted her memory to it in the most skilful way.

"We ought to be thinking of going home, sister Utter," said the burgomaster's wife to her companion, taking up her reticule from the table, "but I know beforehand that it is no use attempting it. Mistress Utter is too good a hostess to let her guests escape her;" and so saying the lady settled herself comfortably in her place.

Mistress Utter answered as she considered only proper; but she was ready to laugh aloud as she saw the despair that was expressed on Williamson's features.

Out of pity for her little engineer, the old lady managed so that the party broke up sooner than was the custom on such occasions; but for Williamson the day was utterly lost.

The counsellor laughed in his sleeve, as he saw how his old wife had been frustrated in her schemes, and he determined that Williamson should have to thank him instead for a happy termination to his suspense.

As he parted that evening from his opposite neighbours, he said, very artfully, as if it had just occurred to him: "I wish, my good friend, Mrs. N——, would just come over to-morrow morning to see some stuff that our good mother has got for a summer waistcoat for me? I should like to have her opinion about it."

Mrs. N—— promised very naturally to come and give her advice in the important matter.

"Why, father, you are more cunning than I thought you," said the old lady, when the guests were gone, and Williamson's step was heard on the upper floor.

The counsellor smiled good-humouredly. It was his triumph that he had beat her in cunning, and he gave her a sly hint, as he said, "Yes, yes; now you see, for the second time, that you lose nothing by taking me into the secret."

His old wife offered him a pinch of snuff, and nodded her approval.

CHAPTER XXIX.

My heart, once barren, fills itself with joy,
Expanding like a flag of triumph now.
VITALIS.

WILLIAMSON, who this night was not much visited by sleep, had been long watching for the morning sun, when at last, to his unspeakable joy, it began to shine through the flower-pots in his window.

It was still a long while to the hour when Mrs. N—— would pay her visit to his hostess, but still he had the consolation of being able to say: "It will happen to-day!" And he repeated this "to-day" with all the more security that he had formed a resolution that even if all the old women of the town were united in a conspiracy against him, he would yet, before evening, be a betrothed lover—not quite that: yet it was impossible that Marie Louise could again——

Certain of victory, he began to sing merrily, as he walked up and down his room, which soon awakening Mistress Utter, it announced to her that he was ready to take his coffee.

At eleven o'clock, Mrs. N—— came over the street, and scarcely was the counsellor's little parlour door shut upon her, when Williamson flew like an arrow up the steps of the opposite house. Almost breathless for fear a new hindrance should have come in his way, he pushed open the door of the room, and found Marie Louise in evident confusion, standing at the window in the bow.

"Now, now, good God, at last!" he exclaimed, and without further preamble, he clasped her closely to his heart. "Now, Marie Louise, thou art mine!"

"Yes, William," whispered she, softly, "now I am thine! thine!"

"And blessed as I, — mine with the fullest feeling, that now for the first time thou art truly happy?"

"Oh, William, why this question?"

"Because, my beloved, my inexpressibly beloved, because I must ask it! I want a great return for all the sorrow thou hast caused me—say to me all that thy feelings at this moment speak?"

"My feeling," answered Marie Louise, as, with his arm around her waist, she allowed him to draw her towards him as they sat on the sofa, "ah, that says so much! First of all it asks whether thou canst quite forgive and forget, William, that there was a time when the most unworthy motives prevented me from expressing the feeling which filled my heart? And then—can I, after so much that has passed, and after I have been the wife of another, can I become to thee all that thou hast believed and expected me to be? Oh, I would fain say much more, but I cannot say it!"

"My sweet, my beloved Marie Louise! get rid of all these uneasy fears for ever! Neither now or ever could I be so base as to remind thee of those times, except to admire the heroism with which thou hast borne misfortune—no, my beloved, the past belongs not to us, and we will let it rest. But the present, the radiant future, that is ours, our mutual possession —yet thou hast not answered my request; will my noble-hearted Marie Louise still hesitate to tell her future husband what he so longs to hear?"

"My William! why do you require words, when thou canst read my looks? Yet, why should I be perverse, why should I not confess that I never, never, was as happy as I am now?" and her head sank upon the breast of the long beloved one.

Heaven and earth and all things were lost sight of in the eternity of that moment. Neither of them knew that there had been a time past, nor that there was a future—they knew only that they were united at last.

"With the door wide open?" cried the counsellor, who, as a reward for his trouble, had come to be the first to congratulate. "In bright noon-day, and with open doors, to sit and kiss each other, that is, I must confess, a little too strong!"

Marie Louise sprang up confused, and deeply blushing, but with eyes beaming with happiness, and she threw herself, as if seeking a shelter, on the bosom of the old man. William, on the contrary, exclaimed joyfully, as he shook him heartily by the hand: "My good uncle has certainly forgotten the joy of such a moment, when he has had the heart to interrupt it!"

"And what if the burgomaster's wife or the postmaster's wife had interrupted it? You ungrateful fellow, to receive the man whom you have to thank for your happiness in such an unpolite manner!"

"That is true, so I will withdraw my words. And now I must go and tell Aunt Gretchen," and down the stairs and over the street he flew.

Not more than half a second was he in passing between these two women whom he loved so well, and then throwing his arms around his dear, his mother-like "Aunt Gretchen," he embraced her so closely, that the old lady exclaimed, "Let me go, let me go, you madman! No need to ask now if all be settled; but here stands one who has a right to take a part in the affair."

"My mother, my beloved mother!" said Williamson, taking respectfully the hand of Mrs. N——, with whom he was not so familiar, "dare I venture to hope that the mother of Marie Louise will become mine also?"

"With my whole heart! It was always my dearest wish. I need not say, make Marie Louise happy, for I know she could not be happy with any one else."

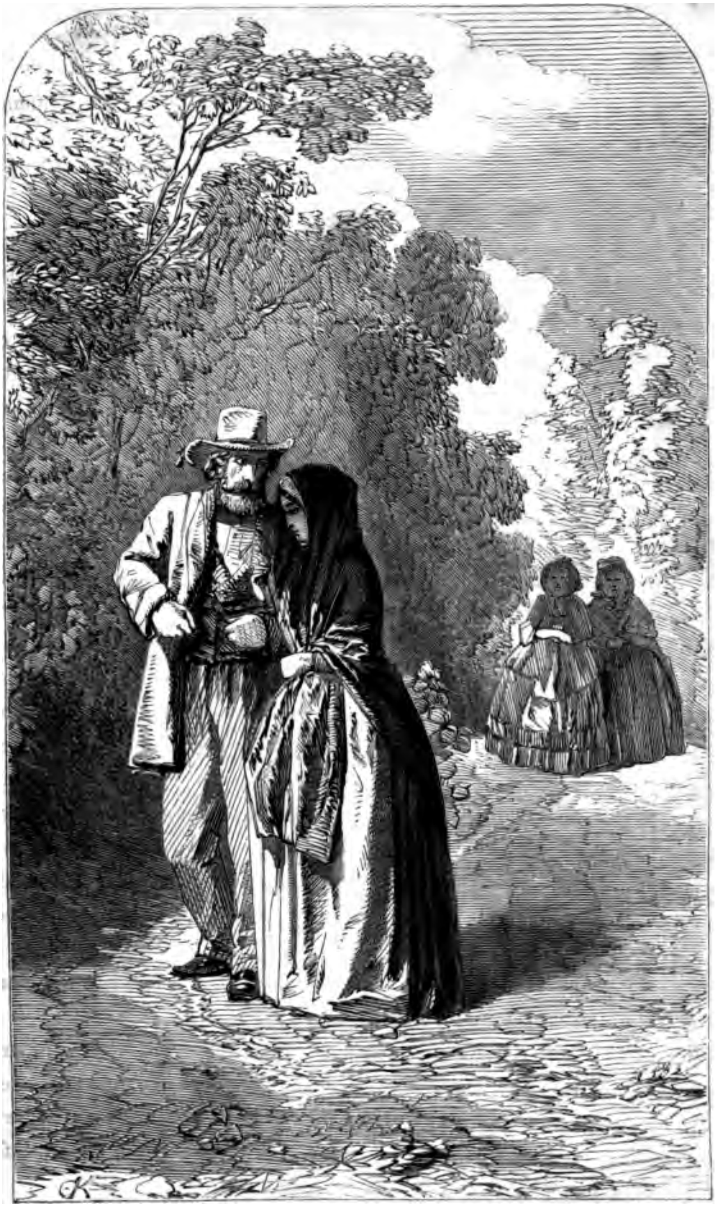
And now Williamson danced again around the two old ladies, for grave and solemn as the occasion required he could not become. But Mrs. N—— checked his delirious joy a little, when, with a warning voice, she said, "Hush, hush! Remember that the betrothal must remain a profound secret. Do not forget that Marie Louise must do nothing inconsistent with her present garb on——"

"Ah, yes, I know it well," rejoined Williamson; "and no one shall say that I am not propriety itself. But now I must return to my betrothed."

And on the same evening, Marie Louise, under the escort of her mother and Mistress Utter, wandered arm-in-arm, with Williamson, over the new house. On this occasion Williamson was very naturally not on earth, but high in the heavens, and Marie Louise hovered somewhere between the two. She looked at everything in a sort of confused whirl; but when at last they reached the "wing room," which was more particularly destined for her, her feelings were aroused to the deepest and holiest gratitude. This "wing-room" contained the elegant and costly furniture which, when still unmarried, she had purchased for a favourite room at Malcolm's-Ness. Ah, on this very sofa, how many a time had she sat and thought, and thought again, on him who was now by her side! A thousand times had she thought and wished that she could only become poor again, and return to the same circumstances under which they had parted; and now all lay behind her in the distance; trials and storms had come to an end, and they were again united. But was it not a dream? Was, indeed, such blessedness possible on earth? "Oh, God!" said she, with a sigh, as she leant her brow upon his shoulder, "I know not how one can survive such moments as these!"

"Now that I have heard this confession from your lips, my Marie Louise!" said Williamson, looking into her deep eyes, "I have no reason to complain any more of my six years of probation. This hour, and all future hours, could not be paid for with less!"

"And what were you not doing for me during all that time?



WILLIAMSON AND MARIE IN THE GARDEN.

Oh, William! I never could tell you before what I suspected—but now there are to be no more secrets between us."

"Do not remind me of it, my beloved," said he, and a shade of sorrow passed over his features; "that time, alas!—but no more of it. If ever a woman had a tender and loving husband, yours shall be one, were it only on account of the view from this window," and he pointed to the bow-window which they could see nearly opposite, "which was once so much to me for I had no hope, no consolation, but the memory of the past."

"And I," added Marie Louise, as she followed the direction of his eyes, "I thank God that this house was built here, and that this beloved little room, which I shall choose for my everyday sitting-room, is so situated, that, in my daily prayers, I can look across to that lowly roof where my fate was decided, and where, through my own sad fault, I brought on myself years of misery; and where, too, my repentance and tears have, I trust, washed away the stains which this fault may have left behind."

Marie Louise spoke these words in deep emotion, and Williamson replied to them only by a close embrace.

"Mr. Engineer!" resounded the voice of Carl, at the door.

Carl had, from a brisk servant lad, become a most gentlemanly valet, and was still a great favourite with his master.

"What is the matter?" inquired Williamson, who, as Carl could observe, was not particularly pleased at his appearing at this moment.

"Mr. Pellander is out there, and I cannot get rid of him."

"Brother Will'son—your obedient servant—brother Will'son!" was heard, through the half-opened door, in Pellander's well-known voice. "Brother of my heart, Will'son, as I am in the town, I must—Ah! visitors here—the good lady, who, thank God, looks so pretty, that no one would ever think of the fall of snow last year, although, it must be said, it fell pretty thick. Well, now, may one congratulate—may one congratulate?"

"A half year too soon, Uncle Pellander," replied Williamson. "But if, on the honour of an advocate, uncle will keep our secret, I will invite him to the wedding that is to take place all in good time; and I swear, in the presence of my adored bride, to make him a present, on that day, of a whole dozen bottles of the finest rum, in remembrance of our expedition to the island of Säfö."

"Ah, brother Will'son, brother Will'son, and you, my good little lady, who will become, in good time, Mrs. Will'son, whereby—I think it my duty to say it openly—you will lose nothing; as long as a drop remains in the dozen bottles, will I drink to the health of you both."

"But, my good Mr. Pellander," said Marie Louise, "do not forget that you are on your honour; but I know that Mr. Pellander is very careful."

"Oh! madame, madame, my little, good lady, Mrs. Will'son—Mrs. Engineer, I ought to say—I have always made it my duty to keep secrets! But I did not come here without having a little business to do. A certain thing—that is to say, article—as you please to call it, has come into my possession for a second time; in what manner, it is quite unnecessary to relate. I had the intention to offer it for sale to brother Will'son; but, as I see that affairs here have taken this pretty turn, and considering that little letter which the good lady—yes, yes, be so good as to look this way, my lady—it is my full intention to present this little valuable as a gift to the bride of my dear friend and brother, and I only ask, in return, to be considered as a family friend of this worthy couple."

To the astonishment of Williamson and Marie Louise, Pellander drew forth the golden snuff-box, which, during Von Walden's illness, had a second time been disposed of, and he placed in her hands the once cherished keepsake, now so closely connected with the events of her past life.

"How, for Heaven's sake!" cried Williamson; "my poor Marie Louise, has this friend again——"

"Oh, hush, hush!" she implored, blushing; "but Mr. Pellander, that is impossible."

"Oh, your obedient servant, your obedient servant! I have had many a good bit of business with the good lady, and do it out of friendship for brother Will'son, my dear friend, who, as the good lady very likely knows, was the giver of the snuff-box the first time, although the rogue made me write the letter that the lady was so grateful for."

The glance which Marie Louise exchanged with Williamson, convinced him, that this information was not new to her; and he said joyfully: "Let it be as Uncle Pellander wishes! But I beg my good uncle to remember, that I should never have permitted my future wife to accept such a costly present from him, if I did not wish to testify my grateful respect to him for the kind consideration my Marie Louise received from him at a time when he was concerned in her affairs; and secondly, were I not convinced that this present, which one would have been frightened to receive from another, to the rich Pellander is a mere trifle. You must know, my love, that a person like the renowned legal agent and commissioner, Josias Pellander, will, in the next profitable concern that he undertakes, earn twice the value of this."

"Upon honour, brother Will'son," answered Pellander, much flattered, "you do not say wrong! Brother Will'son has always judged me rightly; for, without boasting, I consider it always my duty to pay myself well for my time and trouble on all occasions."

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There was a great disturbance, a perfect uproar, when, at the end of the year of widowhood, the betrothal of Williamson and Marie Louise was publicly announced.

The town had never expected this. They could not, indeed, find a fit name to apply to such conduct; for there was not a single mother in the place who had not cast her nets to catch the handsome and wealthy engineer, who, after all, had nothing to do with their good town, and now, like a fool, was going to unite himself to a mere beggar, who had to thank the kindness of the town ladies for her very maintenance.

At first there was not a single lady who did not resolve that nothing should induce her to go to the wedding; but the nearer the important day approached, the more they began to repent of this decision, and to consider that it would be better not to display their vexation so openly; besides this, it would be a sin to vex the poor things so much.

Meantime, the last possible day for the invitations to appear arrived, and yet they came not; for Marie Louise had determined that the ceremony should be performed in the greatest privacy possible; and as for the town, the dinner which was given the next day, followed by the customary ball, was so brilliant and well arranged, that all parties were reconciled.

"Yes," said some of our town ladies, as they went about calling on each other to talk it over, "she was really very amiable and agreeable, little Mrs. Williamson, and there was something, if you observed, quite humble in her deportment."

"To be sure," rejoined another, with a significant smile, "we have never heard that she has a bad memory, and it is not so long since that she found her way back again entirely through our compassion."

"At all events," said the clergyman's wife, in conclusion, "she belongs no longer to the aristocratic party, but is quite as much of a citizen as ourselves, and it can never be a question as to who she will associate with or not, now that we are disposed to be on a familiar footing with her."

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The town had never another opportunity of complaining of Marie Louise, although all things returned to their former course. Without the other ladies being conscious of it, she formed again the principal ornament of their society, in manners and dress, as well as in beauty, and became their model for imitation as far as this was possible.

On a beautiful day in spring, about a year after Williamson's marriage, a little festival in honour of a christening was celebrated in his family. The mother-in-law and Aunt Gretchen were immensely busy in every direction, whilst Williamson, wild with joy, was singing and running in and out of the house, but every now and then paying a visit to the wing-room, where sat Marie Louise leaning back on the sofa-cushions, and with her feet resting on a stool that he busied himself every ten minutes in adjusting.

On one of these occasions, Marie Louise expressed a wish that he would bring her a parcel out of a drawer in the inner room. Williamson turned everything over and upside down in two or three of the drawers without finding what he fancied must be the right thing, and at last, unlocking the top drawer he removed a white napkin which covered its contents, and exclaimed, in surprise: "What, in the name of goodness, my love, is this?" and going to the door of the room where his wife sat, "What can you possibly want with those rags there?"

Marie Louise made signs that he should bring them to her, and he presently stood by her sofa with an old stained and shabby bombazeen dress in one hand, and a rusty old black shawl in the other; then, beginning to suspect the meaning of it all, he rested his eyes with inexpressible tenderness on his adored wife.

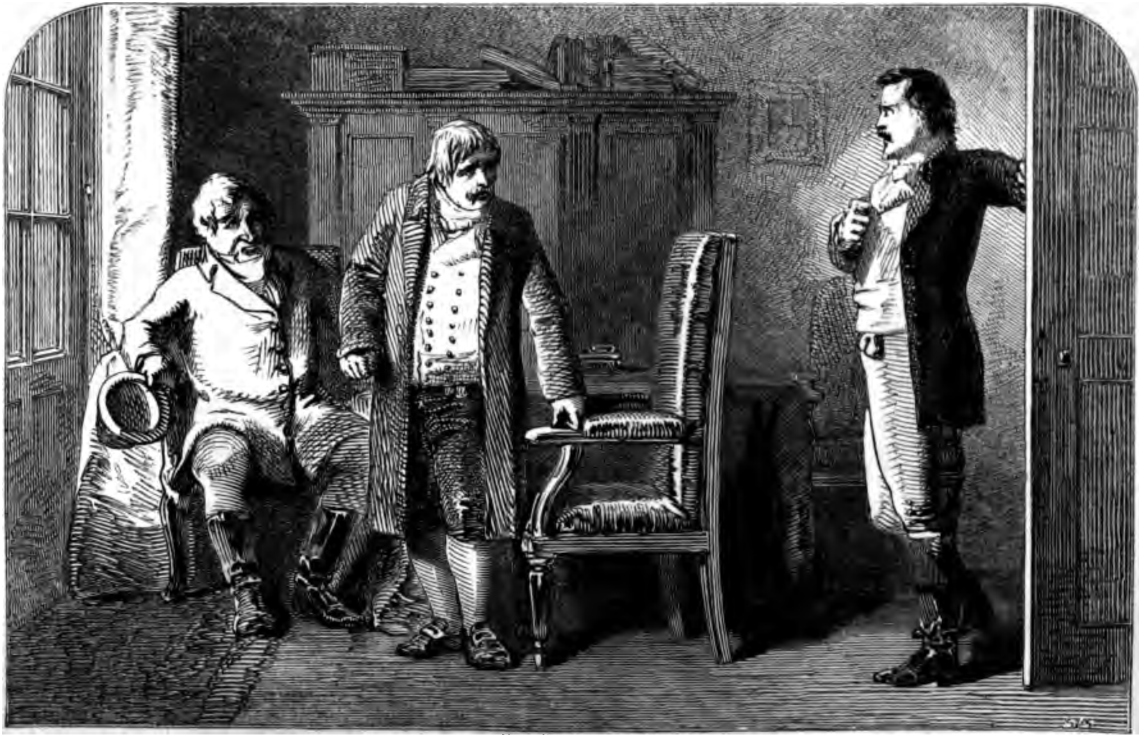
"These rags, as you call them, dear William," said she, in deep emotion, "I received as a gift of charity when I returned here destitute of almost everything. The day I received them was perhaps the most humiliating in my life; but in order to keep up the remembrance of it, and to have ever before my eyes a wholesome companion, I preserve these things in the same chest of drawers that I keep all the dress and ornaments that you have lavished on me; and if ever I feel tempted to pride or presumption, I open that drawer, the contents of which have more eloquence than all the sermons in the world. I mean, some day, my dear William, to show them to our daughter, and I hope that the moral that lies in these old rags will preserve her from all her mother's faults."

"God grant," said Williamson, much touched, as he threw his arms around his wife, "that she may inherit all her mother's virtues, and I can wish her no better portion! Oh, my beloved wife—for such moments the earth is too narrow!"

"Why speak of earth," said she, smiling archly. "Do I not see by your eyes that you are above the clouds?"

"And I say that you are both in the clouds," exclaimed Mistress Utter, as she appeared at the door, "for here I may stand and talk myself hoarse, before I even make myself heard, and before you will let me tell you that the clergyman is come, and all is ready for the ceremony which is to give us another little Marie Louise."

END OF MARIE LOUISE.

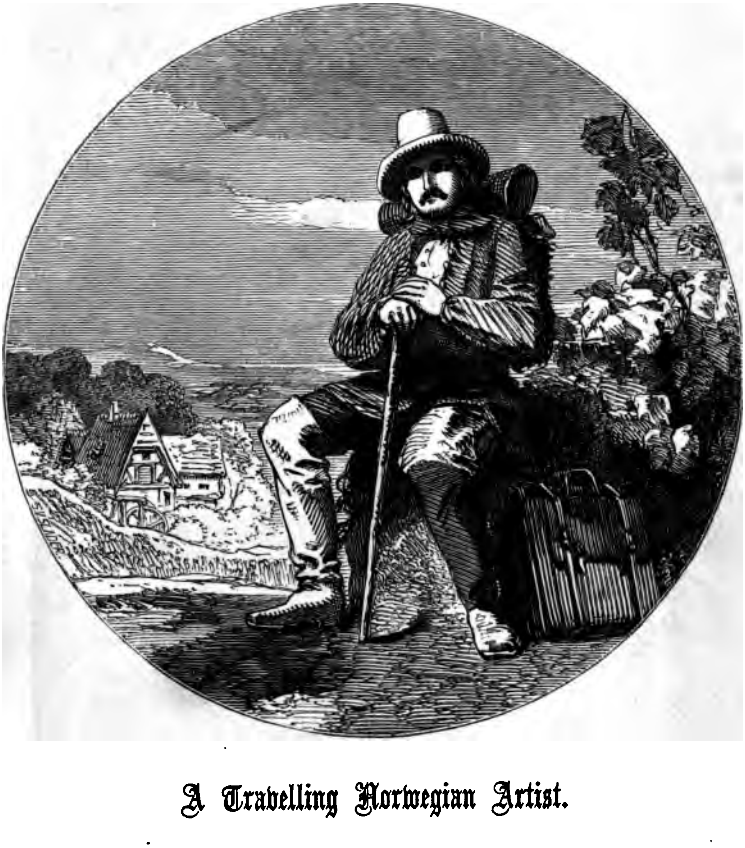


THE COUNT, THE PROVOST, AND THE PAINTER.

PASSAGES

IN THE

LIFE OF JAMES LEGANGER,



A Travelling Norwegian Artist.

By EMILIE CARLEN.

PASSAGES

IN

THE LIFE OF JAMES LEGANGER.

The heart is like a cup, which holds
The waves of life, the heaven's dews—
A cup wherein love's tender rose
In storms of time both blooms and fades.

RIDDERSTOD.

I WAS an active young fellow of three-and-twenty, when, with a knapsack at my back and a couple of dollars—my sole riches—in my pocket, I passed out of the city gates of Christiania, and took the road to Tonsberg, where my father, who in his youth had been a skilful artist, was now, through poverty and impaired eyesight, obliged to follow the humble, yet not unimportant, vocation of a coffin-painter.

"Well, to my mind," would my mother say, "so that one earns a living in an honest way, what can it matter whether one paints on canvas or on wood?"

My father and I, when I began to think and judge for myself, were, in this matter, of another opinion; but the old man, who, in his household, and towards my mother, was not disposed to be very rigid, left undisputed this assertion of his better half. In the long winter evenings, during which, at that time still a boy, I held a light to him as he painted his coffins, he told me tales of his earlier and happier days, when, an ardent lover of painting, he lived for his art alone; and he gave to his picturings of the past far more brilliant colours than they had ever had in reality, and painted each one brighter than the last. He gave me instructions secretly in the art of guiding the pencil, my mother looking upon it as waste time, and considering coffin-painting a much more profitable employment.

When, however, my parents saw that, with each succeeding year, I gave increasing promise of skill, they resolved on sending me to Christiania to develop still farther my talents, which they thought might possibly, in time, bring more profit than my father's profession.

I was sixteen years old when I went to Christiania, and through the assiduity with which I worked and studied, was considered a tolerably skilful artist when, at three-and-twenty, I left the city again to travel in foreign lands. My journeying was, however, to be on foot; since my scanty income was sufficient only to provide me with the humblest fare and plainest clothing.

I had resolved first to see Sweden, and then pass through Denmark to Germany, and God knows where, on the wings of imagination, I did not mean to travel; certainly over half the earth. Before I commenced my long wanderings, however, I wished to visit my native place, to receive from my parents all they had to give—their blessing.

The sight, once more, of the old workshop, where my father sat, as usual, in the midst of his coffins, his white hair streaming over his wrinkled brow, made a deep and ineffaceable impression on me. As he heard my footsteps, he arose; and when he saw his only and beloved son again, his loving heart beat many strokes more in the minute than usual. We fell into each other's arms.

"Come, let us go in to your mother," said my father, at last; "I will not have all this joy to myself. She has shared my troubles for so many years, it is fair that she should take part in my happiness."

What an evening it was! A true festival. The very angels in heaven must have rejoiced over it.

The next morning my knapsack was unpacked, and there was an inspection of all my sketches and finished drawings. Of course these were few in number, since the colours of my pictures were seldom well dried, before I was obliged to sell them for my livelihood. My father turned them over with the delight of a child looking at the rows of painted dragoons with drawn swords in their hands in his picture-book. At the other end of the table on which they were carefully laid, sat my mother, with her spectacles on her nose and her hands in her lap; it was thus only she enjoyed the treasures which her James had brought home. Nothing could describe the delight of both parents when they got hold of the ivory tablet on which was a likeness of their wandering son. I took a pleasure in portrait painting, and during my leisure, had painted this picture, which I knew would be the most acceptable present I could leave with my parents on my departure. But I will not dwell longer over the simple but pleasant remembrances of my youthful years.

With an addition of three shirts to my knapsack, and the blessing of my parents in my heart, I bid these never to be forgotten beings farewell, whose deep and pure love was afterwards my only consolation during my troubled life, by giving me the hope of passing through the stony bridge of faith to Him who is the source of all love. And yet what a struggle is needed in approaching this bridge, so that our little skiff may not be lost in the roaring waves of the bottomless sea!

At that time I thought little of these things. My mind was as light and elastic as my body; the weight of neither grief nor money bowed me down. Brisk and active, I passed over our mountain ridges, and wherever I went, was I well received. The coin with which I paid for my night's lodging, my food, and drink, consisted in caricatures that I drew whenever I took a day's rest; and thus I travelled onward. Only in towns was I obliged to encroach on the two dollars which formed my capital. I met with many vicissitudes, and lived through many an adventure, but my pleasure in these vanished at a period when events devoured as it were the strength of my days—lapping up with a greedy tongue the blood from out my heart, and leaving a poison behind which dried up and destroyed my nerves.

After stopping some time in Gothenburg, where my talent as a portrait painter procured me work and fame, I again, in spite of the entreaties of my friends to settle in this place, indulged my taste for travel, and started once more on my wanderings.

I passed through various provinces, and had already, in thought, set one foot in Schonen, when one evening, tired in body but not in spirit, I saw with joy the spire of a church, telling me that a village was near, and not far from it an old Gothic castle. At the sight of these enticing objects, I resolved not to proceed to Schonen, but to remain in a province which had always shown me so much hospitality. I quickened my steps, so as not to disturb my future host at too late an hour, and the sun was not quite sunk in the west when I was seeking to effect a treaty of peace with the watch-dog which guarded the house of the provost of Hammarby—for so the village was named.

It was not easy to manage this. The dog barked frightfully, and laid its fore-paws against the railings, resolved, apparently, to seize me by the coat flaps, should I venture to open the gate. As my wardrobe required nothing to make it worse than it was, I had to consider what I must do. I was taking counsel with myself, when a young girl made her appearance at the open window, and after inspecting me for a few seconds with her black and sparkling eyes, the window was closed, and presently the girl came out of the house.

"Hector, Hector, fie upon you!" cried she to the dog, in a half-joking, half-threatening tone. Hector crouched down submissively at the feet of his mistress. With her own hands the maiden opened the gate and begged me to walk in—a request I gave no occasion to be repeated.

As soon as I had crossed the threshold I announced myself as a travelling artist, and begged for a few days' hospitality.

The provost, a man already past middle age, complied with much friendliness to my request, and the beautiful Sigrid, his daughter, seemed to have nothing to say against it.

In the course of conversation during supper, the provost mentioned that the count, who lived at the Castle of Hammarby, had long wished to find a skilful painter who would make some stay in the place, in order not only to paint the portraits of the family, but also to restore and re-touch the paintings of his picture gallery, which, although much neglected, contained many valuable works, and especially a numerous collection of the ancestors and relatives of his noble house. I know not what made this statement so enticing as to make me desirous of the engagement. Perhaps it was the hope, that through this means I could earn funds wherewith to prosecute my journey more conveniently; perhaps the pleasure which I derived from the idea of spending my time in the old gothic castle, which stood like a giant of the past, on the limits of two epochs of time, to each of which it was bidding adieu. I loved with passionate admiration all remains of former days; and a gothic, half-ruined castle, must naturally be an object of the deepest interest to me. Or whether, besides all this—which for so ardent an imagination as mine was sufficient — there were still another attractive power in my heart, I am not able quite to say, as it would be ridiculous to assert that even that first evening I had so entangled myself in Sigrid's yarn that I could not again extricate myself from it. That I certainly could have done, by starting the very next morning again on my travels, and by not so filling my head with thoughts of the chivalrous adventures, with which, according to my fancy, the old castle was pregnant, and only needed an opportunity to bring forth.

The room into which I was shown for my night's rest was situated at the gable end of the house. It was desolate-looking, and contained nothing but a bed and a few clumsy old-fashioned chairs. Yet how much dearer the room so furnished became to me, than in aftertimes when adorned as a bridal chamber!

When I entered the sitting-room the next morning, I found Sigrid awaiting me with the beer posset, which her own hands had prepared. I now first had an opportunity of observing her more closely, and the impression which she made on me was ineffaceable. Never, in my fairest dreams, had I seen such a face and form. The fire of her eyes burnt my reason to ashes, and the smile of her lips was now as warm and loving as the sun of spring, and now as cold as the snows of our mountains—raising me one moment to heaven, and the next drawing me down to earth again.

The same day at noon, the provost took me with him to the castle. As we passed through the long and gloomy entrance, it seemed to me as if I lived already in the realms of tradition; and I gave myself wholly up to my impressions as two ponderous folding doors were opened, and we entered a large octangular apartment, whose leather hangings, embossed with gold, were here and there loosened from the wall, and admitted the whistling wind. The Gothic windows rose to the vaulted roof. Our steps echoed as we trod the waxed floor, which to me had an unpleasant effect; for it seemed as if, in this enchanted castle, we ought to have moved as lightly and noiselessly as spirits.

Soon, however, my delight was at an end. My eyes had only half taken a survey of the trophies, pictures, and wonderful things around me, when other folding doors opened, and we found ourselves in a smaller apartment, before the possessor of this ancient dwelling. On a sofa, covered with blue velvet, reclined a tall thin man, who was examining the polished lock of a double-barrelled gun, which a young fellow of about fifteen had handed to him after having cleaned it.

"That is right, Borstadt! In time, you will be fit to have the charge of the armoury," said the count, without deigning to cast a look upon the low-bowing provost. "But go, my lad," added he, "and tell the lazy scoundrels, the lubbers outside there, not to let any one come in to me unannounced. So, then, it is Provost Oernroos, is it? Well, you are welcome! But what sort of sheep have you caught and brought with you? That is not one of your flock, it seems to me.—Was no one in the anteroom?"

"No, please your excellency,—no one who could announce me," answered the provost, with a continued low bowing. "I have taken the liberty of bringing with me a travelling artist from Norway—the landscape and portrait painter Leganger. It occurred to me that your excellency would perhaps give him an opportunity of making here a trial of his skill."

"Aha,—landscape and portrait painter,—I take it not ill that you should have thought of me, my dear provost. My gallery, as I have already told you before, wants setting to rights. The young man can make a few attemps by which I shall be able to judge of his talents. To-morrow my son returns,—he can communicate my wishes to Mr. Leganger. At all events, he may as well set to work to-morrow."

After this I was free to busy myself with my own thoughts, and when the count and the provost had spoken together for some time on other matters, the audience was concluded, and we returned to the provost's house, where from this day, a wholly new life began to dawn upon me. It would be tedious were I to relate all the varied shades of colouring which my new connexions brought me. I took up my abode at the castle, where I worked assiduously all day, so as to be able each evening to enjoy undisturbed the delight which the charming Sigrid's company afforded me. When I first came to Hammarby, the leaves of the trees already glowed with red, and fell upon the turf of autumn. Now it was spring. All around, like my hopes, was in the fullest bloom and beauty. I never dreamed that the gates of Paradise would ever be shut against me.

When, towards midsummer, my labours at the castle were ended, the provost invited me to spend a little time at his house, to continue the lessons in drawing, which I had began to give to Sigrid, and her little brother Sebastian. The latter had been often employed in moving backwards and forwards with the tender *billets* which I and Sigrid exchanged; for I need scarcely mention that, with my ardent temperament and lively fantasy, I could not rest in peace until I had attained the certainty that Sigrid returned my attachment. And although our hopes were built, as may well be imagined, only on the future, we felt too happy during our present union to disturb ourselves with melancholy reflections. But this was not to last long.

I had painted the portrait of my beloved, and placed it over the fire-place in my chamber. To this picture, when not enjoying the bliss which the presence of the original afforded me, could I give utterance to all the enthusiastic and eloquent terms, which a young heart delights in expressing, when for the first time it loves, and finds its love returned.

During one of these outbursts, it happened that the provost one evening entered my room. Struck with astonishment, he stood at the door, and contemplated me with a look, which gave no favourable prognostic for my wishes and hopes in the future.

"I see that I have, until now, been blind," said he, with icy coldness, "but as the scales have now fallen from my eyes, I will only say that the sooner Mr. Leganger packs himself off the better; for in my house I will have no romances played!"

I felt my blood run boiling hot through my veins, and every fibre in my body trembled as I answered : "I fancied that my feelings towards Sigrid had been long known to you, and in case I was to nourish no hopes, should have expected an explanation long ago."

"Good God, sir, you are barefaced enough !" cried the provost, greatly excited. "Was I, in my own house, to go about like a spy, and pry into matters that never once entered my head ? I should sooner have believed that—that—in fact I do not know what I should not sooner have expected than that you, sir, a wandering painter, should aspire to becoming the son-in-law of the provost of Hammarby. Tie up your bundle this moment, I tell you, or I will send some of my people to help you !"

Irritated to the greatest degree by this insulting behaviour, and the contemptuous expressions of the provost, I was incapable of bringing out a single word ; my movements showed, however, that I was not disposed to encroach a minute longer on his hospitality. I tore violently open the doors and drawers of the old oaken wardrobe, and taking out my effects, threw them in a pile in the middle of the room.

Appeased by seeing these preparations for my departure, the provost left my room, and went down stairs ; and when the object of my anger was no longer there, I, too, grew somewhat cooler, and resolved, before I packed up my things, to seek an interview with Sigrid.

It was now just the hour when the provost was accustomed to take his usual walk round his farm—a custom he never, by any chance, omitted. I flew to the sitting-room, and was surprised by a sight that before this time had produced an unpleasant impression on me—viz., the presence of the young count from the castle, who was fond of conversing with Sigrid, and seemed sometimes to win from her smiles which I considered due only to me. But Sigrid was of a lively temperament ; and when her eyes turned once again on me with an expression of the tenderest affection, I would reproach myself for my injustice in mistrusting her manners towards the young count, which I ascribed to an interest on her part, but which, her flattering words persuaded me afterwards, sprang only from my own jealous fancy. Meanwhile, this present meeting with the count was more unpleasant than usual, not only because he prevented me from speaking with Sigrid, but because I thought I saw plainer traces than ever of coquetry in her manner. As I entered, I received from her a glance as bright and melting as her looks at all times were, and from which I often drank in dangerous poison. As I turned aside to conceal as well as I could my emotion, I saw reflected in the glass a glance which she cast at the count of quite *another* kind. It was an electric spark, kindling in his eyes the fire of passion, but in my heart the fiercest jealousy. "Sigrid!" I exclaimed, without well knowing what I was doing, or about to do, "will you let me speak to you for a few minutes? I am about to take my leave."

She turned pale: "You are about to leave? and where are you going?" stammered she; then with a cold and formal "Excuse me, count," which again in some degree appeased my agitation, she withdrew to a little side room, and gave me a sign to follow her.

"What has happened? Are these again nothing but your jealous fancies that thus disturb our happiness?" whispered she, seizing my hands. "Can you imagine, that I care anything for the count, although, on my father's account, and to gratify his vanity, I sometimes give him a friendly reception? Alas! why are you so unjust as to doubt my love, and torment yourself with your own imagination? You certainly are not thinking of leaving? No, that is impossible!"

"And yet it must be so, Sigrid, unless you can persuade your father to give his consent to our union. An outburst of my feelings betrayed me as I stood before your beloved picture.

Your father heard, and came unexpectedly into my room. Then came explanations between us both, and the end of it all is, that he has shown me the door in the most insulting manner."

Sigrid appeared in despair, yet she did not offer to attempt to persuade or appease her father. When I asked whether she had not courage to venture something for our love, she answered reproachfully:

"Can you question it? Yes, I have courage; but it is not courage but madness to labour against the stream at the moment that it threatens to overwhelm us. Let us wait to see what time can do for us. Much as it grieves me, I must second you in this intention of resuming your travels. Such obedience, I hope, will make a good impression on my father, and when his anger is appeased, and a calm has succeeded the storm, I will see what my love and my eloquence can effect towards the attainment of our end."

"Then, must I, indeed, depart—must I separate from you? Oh Sigrid! have you well considered what sorrow this will cause us? Without thee my life is nothing to me; my strength will give way, my feelings be paralyzed, and my powers in my art vanish in fruitless lamentations over our future prospects."

"And will my lot be a preferable one?" replied she, mournfully. "No, James, that it will not. You will travel, and the change of scenes will gradually raise your dejected spirits, whilst I remain here to long and sigh myself to death. But at all events you will write to me wherever you stop, and if it is possible you shall have tidings from me."

To see Sigrid so composed and so strong, made me blush at my weakness. With despair in my heart I embraced her for the last time; and from this time I know nothing more of what took place, neither how I left the provost's house, nor how, a few weeks later, I reached Copenhagen.

Longer than this, however, the body could not maintain its dominion over the spirit. I sunk into an idle and gloomy brooding, which soon impaired my powers, and incapacitated me from even earning my own support. The only subject on which my thoughts rested was the hope of a letter from Sigrid. I had written to her many times without receiving a reply. At last a letter came from her; but it brought no comfort to me, since she had never found an opportunity of speaking with her father. I was quite beside myself, for I feared, or rather, I saw plainly that her feelings towards me had gradually cooled. But only the more violently did the flame burn in my own breast. It threatened to destroy me; and what was still worse, it made me forget my duty as a son. I no longer wrote to my parents —for what should I write to them? Was I any longer the active, hopeful youth, who had received their blessing to go forth into the world to win honour and independence? No; my passion had destroyed the good seed which had already begun to shoot. I was neither able nor willing to resist its power. I sank deeper and deeper, incapable of raising myself again.

Eight months had passed since my arrival in Copenhagen. I had been unable to pay for either the last quarter of my lodging or for my board, and I sat now in the midst of the four bare walls of my room, into which few rays of sunshine, and even little daylight penetrated; my room was as gloomy as my own soul. The only feeling which roused me, from time to time, from my stupor, was the sense of my undutiful conduct towards my parents; but it served only to increase my sorrow.

I was thus seated, one forenoon, in my miserable apartment, when the letter-carrier entered, followed by my landlord. There was a letter for me; and as it bore upon the seal a count's coronet, the landlord hoped from it some improvement in my circumstances, and brought, himself, the postman to my room. At the first glance, I recognised the arms of the Count of Hammarby; and let it contain what it might, I was so agitated, that a whole world of tumultuous feeling was aroused in my breast, and seemed to threaten to burst it. I begged, as the greatest favour, to be left alone; and my landlord and the letter-carrier withdrew, promising to return the next morning.

At last, I was able, without witnesses, to break open this mysterious and startling letter, whose contents were to make my head turn dizzy and fill my heart with unspeakable joy. I thought I was dreaming; I feared that my excited fancy was raising up deceitful images; I read the letter again, and again. It was reality—truth! I sank on my knees. The sudden change from the torments of hell to the joy of heaven, opened my heart once more to prayer, from which it had long abstained. I thanked God for his mercy.

Here is the letter, word for word; it was in the hand of the old count.

"My dear Leganger,

"I have heard through my son that all is not going on right in the family of my good friend Provost Oernroos, and that in the failing health of the beautiful Sigrid he is threatened with a very severe affliction. Accustomed as I am to look very narrowly into all the affairs of life, it occurred to me that Sigrid's illness must be connected with your departure, and that some extraordinary occurrence must have occasioned the latter, and prevented you from calling at the castle to take leave. When, also, I remembered your very constant walks to the provost's house at the time you were arranging my picture-gallery (which, to tell the truth, secured you my confidence, and convinced me that you deserved encouragement), I thought it very probable that you might be attached to the pretty Sigrid; and as such a circumstance might be within the sphere of my influence, I resolved to seek an interview with the provost, to obtain from him an explanation. He related to me the whole affair, and named to me the ground of his objections, which I found quite insufficient, as I consider that a clever artist is quite an equal match for the daughter of a provost. It would be waste of time were I to repeat all the arguments that I employed to convince the provost of the absurdity of his resolution to see his daughter die with grief, whilst he was ruining the best years of a man's life, who was otherwise capable of becoming a useful and valuable member of society. It will be sufficient to say that he acknowledged his error. And since it always affords me the greatest pleasure to make those persons happy with whom I have ever stood in friendly relations, or who have by their good conduct won my regard, I have promised to give Sigrid, who is my god-daughter, a little dowry, that will be sufficient for you both as a beginning. Whenever I settle a thing, however, in my own mind, I like to have it carried out as soon as possible. Send me, therefore, by return of post, all your papers, your baptismal registry, and your authority for the publication of the banns, and I will contrive so that your union can take place as soon as you arrive. I dare not give Oernroos longer time to think about it, for, great as my influence may be, he is still the father. Therefore be prompt and quick, my dear Leganger, and strike the iron whilst it is warm and soft. Let me know, also, in case you may need money to bring you here. In that case I will send you what is needful, on the receipt of your answer and papers. Do not fill your letter with superfluous thanks. You are a good fellow, and such I have always a pleasure in assisting when it is in my power.

"WILHELM, Count of Hammarby."

"P.S.—My son sends his congratulations; he has this very day started on his long contemplated travels abroad. Farewell!"

Few men can have ever experienced the intense happiness, the boundless feeling of joy that overwhelmed me, as my senses took in the prospect of the heaven now opened before me. I spent the night in tears of joy; and if, in the anticipation of my future happiness the slightest shade was cast, it arose from my surprise that Sigrid should not have written to me herself. Perhaps, thought I, however, it is that she is so weak as not to be able—or that they have not yet made her acquainted with our happiness.

Morning came at last, and with it my host, whom in a few words I made acquainted with the change in my circumstances. Full of sympathy, he officiously procured me all that I required, and in the course of an hour took himself to the post my grateful letter to the count, and the papers which he required. I told him that my unhappy love had made me so incapable of work, and had so interfered with the exercise of my art, that I should be obliged, though with burning impatience, to await a remittance of the promised assistance in money. From this time I lived in a delirium of bliss, which, as my former grief had done, left little time for reasonable thoughts. The answer came later than I had hoped; it contained intelligence, however, which made me perfectly foolish with joy. The banns between me and Sigrid had been published for the first time, and in order that he might be able to announce this, the count had waited a few days before replying. As quickly as I possibly could I arranged my affairs in Copenhagen, and during the time wrote a long letter to my parents relating to them the fate and follies of their lost son, but also announcing to them the happiness that awaited him. To confirm my account, I sent them the letter of the count. Then, after putting my wardrobe in order, I sailed with the first opportunity to Halmö, and from thence travelled inland towards the goal of my fondest hopes, the beloved Hammarby, and found myself at last hastening with the lightest heart and hurried steps down the avenue which led to the red gate of the provost's house. The carriage followed slowly after me, for I felt as if I had suddenly become possessed of wings, and the certainty that this time at least I should not find the young count with my beloved, was a reflection that added to my bliss.

Almost breathless I reached the gate. I had not the same ferocious reception from Hector as on my first arrival, for he recognised his old friend again, and barked loudly with joy. But no Sigrid stood at the window; no light form flitted from the house-door to bid me welcome. Instead of her came my young friend Sebastian, running out to meet me, exclaiming: "Papa will soon be here; but poor Sigrid is ill!"

I felt myself turn pale, and could scarce reach the house. The provost met me on the threshold, and as he embraced me, said: "Times are changed, my dear Leganger. I could not bear to see the grief of my child any longer; and since the count wishes to befriend you, and has undertaken to manage the matter, I have yielded, and now bid you welcome as my son-in-law."

"Oh, your goodness, my worthy father! I can find no words to express my gratitude. But Sigrid is ill—not dangerously, I trust. My heart is ready to burst with this double load of joy, I fear."

"Do not make yourself uneasy, my son. At your side, and with God's help, she will soon recover her bloom; but out of consideration for her weak state, we have only gradually made her acquainted with the happiness which awaits her, and in spite of our prudence, she is still much agitated. She is sleeping now, but in an hour I shall hope to be able to take you to her. Let us, then, empty, meanwhile, a bottle together, in the hope of a happy future!"

After several hours of painful expectation, during which the provost passed backwards and forwards between me and Sigrid, he announced, at last, that she awaited me. He led me to her room, and never shall I forget the impression which the opening of that door—the entrance to such a beloved sanctuary—made on me. My betrothed bride lay on the sofa, so beautiful; but alas! as pale as a corpse. Grief had destroyed the roses of her cheeks, and dulled the brightness of her eyes. She raised them towards me, filled with tears, and instead of the light flush of joy, her face was covered with a crimson blush. I approached her—I kneeled and seized her hand, which I pressed to my burning lips and heart throbbing with anxiety. She looked at me, but there was no soul in her eyes: the smile which played on her lips said nothing—nothing, at least, that I could understand.

"My Sigrid, my dearest Sigrid, give me but a sign, a word, to tell me that my presence gives you but the smallest portion of the joy, the blessedness, that I feel?"

"Blessedness!" said she, slowly; and as she spoke, her brow and cheeks were covered with a deep blush: "are you indeed happy, James?"

"Good Heavens! ask if I am happy when I can call you mine! Does this question require an answer, my Sigrid? I am so happy, that no human creature could compare his happiness to mine, were you only well and would share it with me."

"I shall become so, no doubt," answered she, "when I can become accustomed to this new change in my fate. Till then, have patience with me! I am so nervous, so weak, so irritable, that I cannot bear the slightest emotion or the least agitation. But I shall be better, James. Do not doubt that; for your anxiety would only add to my sufferings."

"I will be strong, my beloved Sigrid; and God will certainly listen to my prayers. You will soon have the same fresh roses in your cheeks as when I saw you for the first time."

"You think me grown plain and fallen away?" she asked, in a hasty tone of vexation.

"The white rose can be as beautiful as the red," I replied, lovingly. "The one is the emblem of health, the other of sickness."

She seemed appeased. The provost then proposed to me to leave her, since she was not allowed to speak much at a time.

"Come with me now to see the newly-furnished bridal chamber," said my future father-in-law, and led me to the apartment which I had formerly occupied. Alas! I found none of the objects in it which had before been so dear to me, except Sigrid's beloved portrait over the fireplace, and that was still what pleased me best: all the rest was altered. The dark wooden panels were now covered with hangings brought from the castle, which represented scenes from "Abelard and Heloïse." The furniture was old-fashioned and costly. Massive chairs of carved wood stood round the walls, and a soft swelling sofa covered with horsehair. Before the latter stood a table of inlaid wood; and over two other tables, with grey marble slabs, were looking-glasses in ebony frames. Between these was the high window in a deep niche. This was raised two steps from the rest of the room, and in the recess stood two seats covered with rich embroidery. Opposite the sofa stood the bed, with heavy, large-flowered, silken draperies. An old black escritoire, and a screen covered with embroidery similar to the window seats, completed the inventory of the furniture. And all these splendours, these luxuries, as the provost related to me with fatherly pride, had the count sent from the castle, to do honour to the young bride, his god-daughter. For my part, I could have slept as soundly in the old oaken bedstead, and rested as well in the old leathern-cushioned chairs; but considering that it was for Sigrid, my pleasure in it all was very great. As soon as I had arranged my things in my room, I hastened to the castle to express my most grateful acknowledgments for all that my noble patron had done.

During the whole of this day, I did not again see Sigrid, but, on the following Sunday, when our banns were again published, I had the happiness of passing a considerable part of the afternoon with her. She was much more cheerful than on my first arrival, and a natural colour in her cheeks showed that her health was improving. Later in the evening she was able to walk slowly up and down her room, leaning on my arm. With each succeeding day our hearts were drawn nearer to each other, and her strength seemed to increase.

At last, within a fortnight after my arrival, the day fixed for our wedding arrived. I will not attempt to describe my happiness. Those who have ever loved themselves can imagine how deeply it sank into my soul. The ceremony, in compliance with Sigrid's and my own wishes, was to have no other spectators than the members of the family, a couple of neighbours, and the count, who arrived the first of the guests. He brought with him two rich goblets, which he destined for the bride and bridegroom, in addition to the dowry which he had promised to Sigrid. Besides these extraordinary proofs of his liberality, which I should little have dreamed of at the time of my first visit to the castle, in seeing his cold and proud expression of countenance, he opened the prospect to me of many profitable engagements in the first Swedish families, through the influence of his recommendations, and advised my settling, as soon after my marriage as possible, in one of the large towns. Whilst he conversed with me relative to these matters, the important hour arrived. The few guests were assembled; the provost led his daughter into the church; the count took her by the hand; and after the lapse of half an hour, I found myself, as it were, at the gates of Heaven.

We sat down to dinner directly after the ceremony, and as my poor Sigrid shivered, and her white teeth chattered with cold, I threw in thick folds around her the costly shawl which the count had brought her as a wedding present. She cast upon me her tearful eyes with an expression of silent thankfulness. "Why does she still weep?" thought I. Perhaps it was but my imagination. But no—she really wept; for as the health of the newly-married couple was being drank, and as we pledged each other in the crystal goblets, in which the red wine sparkled so brightly, I saw that in hers, as she put her lips to it, fell two large glittering tears. It wounded my feelings to see this, and I longed to speak with her alone.

It seemed as if the wedding feast would never come to an end! At last the guests began to leave their seats, and after a ceremonial leave-taking with the count, I led my young wife to our apartments in the gable end of the house. It was now *our* room—alas! what worlds of bliss the fantasy may create!

I carried rather than led my wife to the sofa. Her tears flowed unrestrained, and a convulsive sobbing shook her whole body.

"My Sigrid, my beloved Sigrid," I earnestly besought her, "confide in your husband. What distresses you so unspeakably? Are you not happy? Am I nothing to your heart, that you should so suffer in this hour which unites us, and for which we have both so anxiously longed? I conjure you—be sincere with me! These tears, and the sorrow that is expressed in every feature, give me the deepest anguish."

She leant her head on my shoulder, and her arms clasped me convulsively, but I could not understand a word of that which her white lips essayed to speak. A bitter hour was thus passed by us both. "James," at last, she said, softly, "leave me for a time alone; I shall be better when I am alone. Send me our old servant here. Oh, if my mother had but lived, I should not have been so unhappy!"

In the excited state of her mind I did not venture to beg for an explanation of these last words, but left her to fulfil her wishes. Whilst the old servant was with her, who promised to call me when she was better, I went down into the sitting-room. On my entrance I was surprised to see there the hat and cloak of the count, who, however, was not in the room. I was not mistaken, however, for I immediately heard his voice in the provost's own room.

Words fell on my ear that were wholly incomprehensible to me.

"Well, Oernroos, are you contented at last?" asked the count, in a tone of derision; "your son-in-law is a downright pretty fellow, although no count! This time you have fished in troubled waters, and the cunning Sigrid as well! How could you be so simple as to believe that my son, the heir of my name and my property, would degrade himself so as to marry a provost's daughter?"

"And yet he could degrade himself deeply enough to seduce my poor child, and destroy her happiness for time and eternity! For do you believe that, without torture to her conscience, she has entered into your diabolical plan of betraying the poor fool who now is to call himself her husband?"

These words came from the provost, his voice trembling with sorrow or anger, I know not from which, for I was in a condition that it is impossible to describe. I knew not whether a horrid fever-dream was passing through my brain, or whether it was indeed a still more horrid reality. I approached nearer. With a giant's effort I gained command over my nerves, and pressed my hand so hard upon my betrayed heart, that it seemed as if each fibre of it were crushed.

I stood at the door. The words, the frightfully plain words forced themselves into my very soul, and burnt themselves into it in unextinguishable letters of fire. "What, you ungrateful man," exclaimed the count again, "is that the designation that my plan deserves, through which I have saved the honour of your house and your daughter by the sacrifice of my dignity and money? Is it any part of my duty to interfere in the love affairs of my son, and set that to rights which your own carelessness occasioned? No; that had nothing to do with my obligations as a father; and for nothing but to save you from disgrace, on whom alone it would fall were it to have become known—out of concern for you have I availed myself of the attachment that formerly existed between the young girl and the painter, to form the excellent plan which has now been carried into execution. The poor fellow will not be very particular; and if he should ever find out how matters stand, we can but put a few more dollars in his hand, and the thing is done."

"Do you think that, sir?" cried I, with a coldness and firmness in my tone and manner that came to me at the same moment that I burst open the room door, and entered suddenly. "Do you, indeed, think that?"

(Here, and for several following pages, Leganger's own handwriting becomes unintelligible. The manuscript is continued in another hand.)

Leganger's wild and rolling eyes flashed flames of fire on the two plotters of the diabolical scheme. The self-possession of the provost was at an end; the count, however, recovered himself, and coolly asked: "Well, then, Mr. Leganger, if the circumstances of the case are known to you, you have only to name a sufficient sum by way of compensation; since you must see well that matters must remain as they are. It will therefore be better that you make as little outcry about it as possible."

"You most contemptible of men, who thus tread all feelings of honour beneath your feet, and violate the rights of manhood," thundered out Leganger, with a fierce indignation, "do you think that this is to be an affair of traffic and money, after robbing a man of his good name and honour? But there is a revenge above. You will have no joy from the fruit of your villany. There lives still both law and justice in the land, and your name shall be branded with infamy!" He rushed out.

* * * * *

Leganger knew not where he went. He wandered long in the country around, until coming, in the darkness, in violent contact with a tree, he fell senseless to the earth. A severe blow on his head robbed him of the little consciousness he had left, and not until the next morning was he found by a peasant, who came into the wood where he lay to fetch some timber. The peasant, who recognised him as the son-in-law of the provost, took him to his own cottage; and after he and his wife had endeavoured in vain to bring him to life, or to discover how the bridegroom came at such a time to be in the woods, they sent to the house of the provost, to make him acquainted with what had happened.

Meanwhile, in the provost's dwelling all was in the greatest commotion. All night long they had watched by the side of the young bride, who had been found on the floor of her room in strong convulsions, and who had now sunk into a state of stupor, from which the worst results were to be feared. For more than six weeks the painter lay in the cottage of the peasant who had first discovered him. The wildest delirium of fever raged constantly in his brain, and no moment of calm brought back his remembrance of the lamentable events which had taken place.

At last, however, his malady exhausted itself. It was on a Sunday morning, when he first, with returned consciousness looked around his room. Each object was strange to him. and only by degrees pictures of the past came one after the other before his mind. Some appeared to him in frightful clearness, others were veiled in impenetrable clouds of darkness, whilst the remembrances which they aroused almost plunged him again into the state from which he had just awakened. In what manner he came into the place where he now found himself, he could in nowise understand. With a motion of his hand he beckoned to an old woman, who was the only being in his room. She approached the bed.

"How long have I lain here ill?" asked he.

"May God be thanked and praised that thou canst speak again," answered the old woman. "It is full six weeks since I and my son brought thee here out of the wood."

"Who is your son? I would fain speak with him."

"Yes, when he returns from church; he will stay, though, to see a burial as well."

"A burial?" The blood rushed into the sallow, emaciated face of the painter. "Who, then, is to be buried?"

"Bless me, it was stupid of me to speak of it; but, great God, thou must hear of it sooner or later. It is thy poor wife, who died a few days ago. Yes, yes, the people at the provost's have strange things to tell; but thou knowest well enough, no doubt, how matters have come about."

The old woman was silent, for the sick man cast on her a glance which made the blood in her veins run cold, and she was frightened at the thought of being alone with him in the cottage. He lay quiet, though his hands were clasped, and his eyes, raised to heaven, seemed to assume a calmer look. From time to time he laid his hand on his heart, through which sharp pangs seemed to shoot. But what are the sufferings of the body compared to those of the soul? Leganger's deeply wounded feelings seemed to search in his heart for a place for the unhappy lost one, but found it filled with the most fearful anguish that a man can feel. But the all-reconciling angel of death spread out, nevertheless, her white wings of peace over the storm of his passions. He prayed—prayed for the departed, as he had promised.

Towards evening the family of his hostess returned, and Leganger received from them a letter which had been written to him a month before. He had not then power to break the seal, but the next morning, when he was alone, he opened it and read the following scarcely legible lines from the hand of Sigrid :—

"JAMES!

"Do not look with scorn and hate upon these words from the unhappy, treacherous Sigrid. You said that you would pray for me, and in promising me this, I knew that your heart, which beat for me once so warmly, will not break its vow, as I have done. When I am gone, James, pray for my poor soul! I have sinned much, and great and deep is my guilt towards you. But I have repented in sorrow that no words can tell. It would be in vain to ask for your pardon; no, I cannot have the happiness of taking that with me to the grave. And yet, when I am gone, you must not banish all remembrance of me from your mind, although I am more guilty than you can even suspect. Now, when death already stands before my door, I will not deceive you. Know then, James, that I had received Count Hago's attentions before I learnt to know you. But from you I first learned to love. I loved—I dearly loved you; yet the best and purest of my feelings were destroyed by vanity; and towards the end of the time that you remained in Hammarby, I had formed a secret engagement with the count. My father and I both believed that his passion would be the means of raising me to a high position in the world, and it was to attain our object that I gladly availed myself of the discovery of what had passed between you and me, to secure your departure from Hammarby. I was willing to sacrifice love to pride and ambition. Oh, James, I can tell you nothing more.

"My punishment was not complete,—my father stormed—the young count set off on his travels, and the old count invented the scheme, to which, from fear of disgrace, weak and miserable as

I was, I consented. But I cannot find words to tell you what I suffered between the day when our banns were published and the wedding-day. If it is possible here on earth, James, to atone through anguish of mind for any portion of our guilt, let me believe that I have done so.

"*You will pray for me!* These words return constantly to my remembrance. They are my only comfort, and they pour one drop of balsam into my heart. But my father,—for him, him I grieve deeply. In what is past he acquiesced only from a false feeling of honour for himself and child, to which he sacrificed the true. Let me add, that he was often ready to reveal the whole affair to you; the persuasions of the count, however, and the fear of all the shame that must fall on his house, held him back. You were sacrificed, James! But death atones for much;—the tie will be again broken. Be considerate towards the unhappy suffering old man. The burthen on his own conscience, which he has still to bear, will be heavy enough. To revenge yourself, you are too noble in feeling to wish to add to the weight.

"I write these lines on my knees;—my last words are. Pity and forgiveness for the treacherous, yet repentant and dying,

SIGRID."

"*Yes, death atones for much!*" sighed Leganger, and pressed, with deep emotion, the letter to his lips. "The mercy of God is offered to every repentant soul; how, then, can I refuse the petition of the departed? The tie between us is broken; my heart has already forgiven the erring one: revenge I leave in the hands of the Lord."

And Leganger kept his word. As soon as his strength was restored, he visited Sigrid's grave, where he renewed his vows. He then wrote a few lines to take leave of the provost, in which he told him that he left to Providence to revenge his wrongs. This done, he wandered one evening, with his knapsack again on his back, towards the red-painted gate of the provost's house, where, a year and a half ago, he stood for the first time, and where Sigrid looked upon him from the window like an angel from heaven. A deep sigh stole from his breast. It was dark. He came to the churchyard. The wind rustled among the poplars; they seemed to beckon to him. He entered, and took his last farewell of Sigrid's grave, and then began his wanderings towards his native land.

As he had not kept a single penny of the money offered him as compensation by the count, he was obliged, as formerly, to help himself on in his journey by painting; but he found little work, and could not hope to arrive at the end of his journey before autumn, unless he found other means of support. He was obliged to sell his watch, and several other trifles among his few possessions. In spite of this assistance, he was delayed also by illness; and the leaves were already yellow, when, late one evening, he arrived at his father's dwelling. A light gleamed in the workshop. Leganger softly opened the door, and behold his father sat among his black coffins, just as he had done when he took leave of him two years before.

"Great God!" thought he, "how changed does his son now return to him, after setting forth in the world to win fame and gold." His feelings overpowered him. "Father," said he, suddenly, in a subdued voice, "prepare me a resting place in one of your coffins!" and as he spoke, he sank down on the pile of coffins, which fell around him with a loud crash.

Trembling as if seized with a death-shudder, the old man looked around him. "Was not that James?" said he, trembling at his own words. "James—my son! is it indeed you, or——" and the old man's eyes searched anxiously among the tottering heap of coffins.

It was a melancholy return; and it was long ere the father and son were able to express their feelings in words.

"Good God—my forebodings!" cried, at last, the old Leganger, pressing James's hands in his. "They whispered to me, that the letter in which, three quarters of a year ago, you described your fine castles in the air, promised nothing good. It seemed to me as if the thing could not be all right, and now I see, poor youth, that I was not mistaken."

The kindness of his old father, thus disappointed in all his hopes of his son, touched James deeply. He had shed no tears for his own misfortunes; but the patient sorrow of his father filled his eyes to overflowing, and tears fell upon the withered hands that now held the paint brush with difficulty—those true old friends which had for so many years procured their owner a scanty pittance.

"Oh, my father!" said the son, bowing his head, "you are, indeed, right. I have been grievously deceived. Weak, poor, robbed of my honour, my love, and my peace of mind, I come back to you, and these are the treasures that I bring."

"You bring with you a clear conscience, James? Answer me truly; have you your hands sullied with a crime? then will I have nothing more to say to you."

With a searching glance the father looked at the deeply-moved young man.

"No, my father. I desired to revenge myself, but death laid his appeasing hand between me and those who were the causes of all my anguish. I have forgiven *her*, and she entreated for the *others*. My hands were stayed, and vengeance I have left to the Lord."

"Good, James; then will I bless you again, as when you left me before. When you are more composed, you shall relate to me all that has happened. The Lord is mighty with the weak. You will soon recover yourself again."

James shook his head mournfully. "Let us go in to my mother; but go you first, father. I fear to shock her; I am so altered."

"Oh, no, you will not shock her, James," replied the old man, with suppressed emotion; "she has already gained that which we both want—rest."

"What, my father?" James turned paler than before. The thought of his unnatural forgetfulness, when, in Copenhagen, he had so given himself up to his unfortunate passion, as to neglect his duties towards his parents, now fell upon his heart, and increased still more his grief. What if his long silence had helped to dig the grave in which his mother now lay? He had believed himself too unhappy before for anything to increase the weight of his burthen; and now he stood as if struggling for breath to bear the load which fell upon his conscience.

"James, my son, take heart. She had long been ill. Let us not murmur. She sleeps—we wake; but the Lord looks upon our trouble. We will take comfort. After the storm comes a calm—though it may not be before we sleep at her side."

In silence the father and son fell into each other's arms, breast to breast. The cold sweat from the brow of Leganger moistened the locks of his father's grey hair.

At that moment the hour of midnight was struck by the nearest church clock; soon after fell another loud stroke, the gloomy tolling of a bell followed, and the cry "Fire—Fire!" was heard through the streets.

Presently both father and son were dazzled by flashes of light; a neighbour's house was on fire. The necessity for exertion tore them from each other's arms; they must endeavour to save their little dwelling and few articles of furniture.

But with the morning light they stood shelterless before a pile of smoking ruins, into which their house was transformed. All was gone—house, home, and bread—the one sought comfort in the eyes of the other.

"God be praised, that your poor mother had gone before this!" said the old Leganger. "See, James, yesterday you grieved at her loss, to-day must you acknowledge that what the Lord does is well done. Let us go to her grave in the churchyard—there is now our home."

They went there, and James knelt on the green turf. The grey mist of the damp autumn morning cooled his fevered brow, and the thought of the unfailing love of the sleeping one brought rest to his troubled soul. His heart was filled with indescribable longings; earth with its struggles and sorrows vanished from his view, and his soul seemed to hover in those mansions of peace above the stars, where the burning tears of repentance flow no more, and the fires of reconciliation cast their light around the returning wanderers.

A light sob, which he heard near, recalled him to the world of reality again. He looked around; his father's quiet devotions were also disturbed by the sound; and both now remarked a little girl who, prostrate on a grave which was near their own, was weeping, and who seemed to grasp with her hands the grass which grew upon it, as if she would awaken the slumberer beneath, to arise and console her.

James went to the child. "Poor thing," said he, softly, "whom would you arouse?"

"My father; but he cannot awake. And mamma has been burnt in the night in her little room, and I am left alone—quite alone."

She trembled with cold and sorrow; her hair fell in tangled ringlets round her half-bared shoulders, and as she lay, rested on the rosebush which she had lately planted on her father's grave.

"Poor child,—have you no relations, no friends?"

"No, none,—not a single one! My parents came here out of a land far, far off—I know not where."

James looked at his father. "We ourselves have nowhere to lay our heads," said he, "but as long as we are able to earn with our hands a bit of bread, she shall share it with us. She will have in us protectors—and we in her some one to love."

They took the child with them; and after they had sold the little furniture of the old man which had been saved from the fire, they all three set out on their wanderings into the country, where, for the winter, they settled in a little village. The old Leganger again painted coffins, and James painted little pictures, which Nicolina, the orphan, carried round to sell. So they got on until spring-time came, and then they travelled further. Many years were passed in this manner. At last the little family from Tonsberg settled in a small house, for their first home, in which peace and harmony reigned. James and Nicolina managed the little household, and the old man still worked industriously until he painted his last coffin—which was his own. When James, and Nicolina, who was now nineteen years old, had buried the old painter, they felt that the best link in the chain of their lives was broken. They stood alone. In the breast of James the sorrow which he had felt at his betrayed love, and the wound which the holiest feelings of his youth had received, was never healed. But time blunted the sting of grief and resentment. News had reached him from Hammarby, by which he learned that the provost and the old count had gone to receive the reckoning for their actions before the judgment seat above, and the young count, the origin of all his misfortunes, revelled in all the enjoyments and pleasures which his large possessions afforded him. He was married, and had a son to inherit his riches and name. The whole story of Sigrid's unhappy destiny had been veiled by degrees into a dark legend; for neither in the provost's family, nor in that of the Castle of Hammarby, were all the circumstances of the case ever clearly known.

As James sat now at his easel, and gave life and colour to the forms he invented, his eyes would rest with pleasure on the form of Nicolina, as she diligently wielded the spindle or needle. The flowers of love were faded for ever in his heart—they had been torn up by the roots; yet again there arose within him a quiet longing after domestic joys. He had accustomed himself to the friendly cares of the fair young girl; he had educated her himself, and knew that her heart was free from all but a tender affection for himself. "Many a marriage has been founded on a less sure foundation," thought he, and ventured on the experiment.

Nicolina became a perfect model of a housewife, and in her hands the affairs of the little household prospered. The birth of a daughter was the crowning joy of all.

And as husband and father, Leganger could calmly look back upon the past, all the events of which he recorded, and left as a testament to the son of his daughter.

THE END.

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